AVOID THESE POPULAR CARS P. 98

THE BEST HEARING AIDS • PROTECT AGAINST SKIN CANCER

CR Consumer Reports®

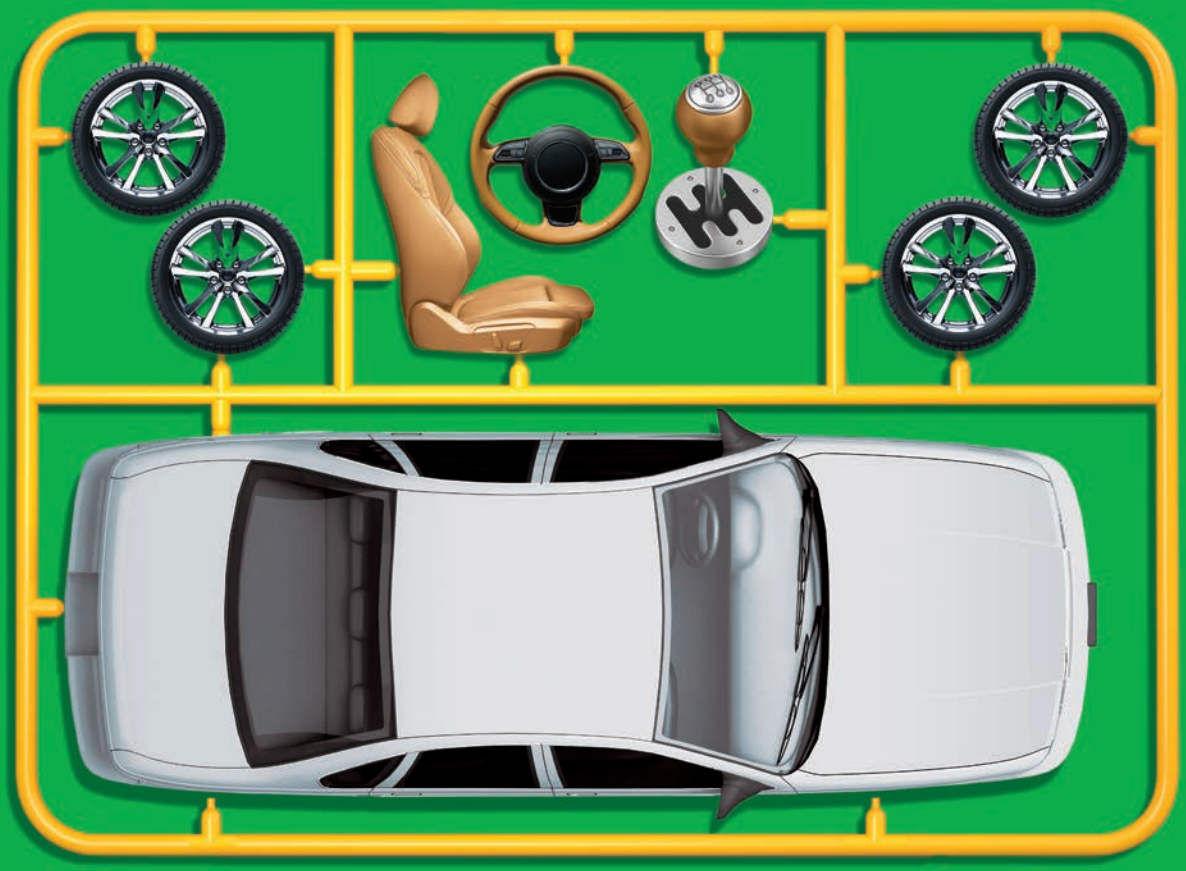
JULY + AUGUST 2025

754 PRODUCTS RATED & REVIEWED

SAVE BIG!

On Cars, Appliances, Mattresses, TVs, Food, and Much More

Put Together a Great Deal ...



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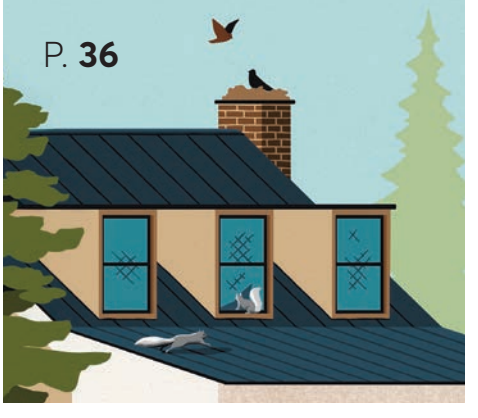

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RATINGS Overall Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 100. We rate products using these symbols:

WORSE — BETTER

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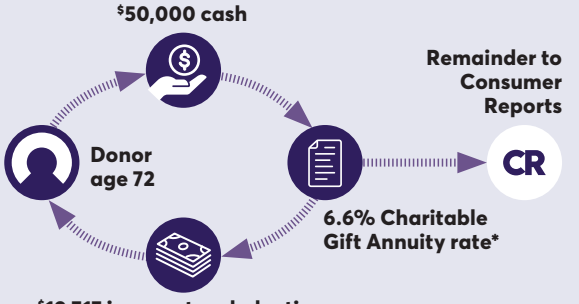

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CR Is Saving You Money

WITH ALL THE TALK of tariffs, rising prices, and volatile markets, recent months have brought a great deal of economic uncertainty. But we can't put our lives on hold while we wait for things to turn around. The bills keep coming. Necessary expenses keep piling up.

That's why CR is always looking for ways to help you save money. This issue's cover story is a case in point. Using the results of our extensive lab tests and owner surveys, "The Better Deal," on page 24, will help you choose products—from appliances to autos—that deliver the best performance for a great price. Advice from our shopping experts can help you save big on everything you buy.

Want to lower your monthly bills? CR can help there, too. Go to **CR.org/billnegotiator** and enter some basic account information about your internet, cable, home security, and other services. Then our partners at Billshark will contact the providers to negotiate for you. CR members get an exclusive discount for the service, and you don't pay anything unless it saves you money.

And rest assured, CR's advocacy team is always speaking up for the policies that put money back in your pocket. For example, we're defending federal energy-efficiency and clean-energy tax credits, which some policymakers are currently trying to eliminate. These incentives have saved American families more than $8 billion in taxes in recent years—and that doesn't include the additional savings they'll get by living in more sustainable and energy-efficient homes for years to come.

Whatever economic hurdles lie ahead, we'll be here for you. Life doesn't stop during times of change—and neither does CR.

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Building a Better World, Together

Join with us to make a safer, fairer, healthier marketplace

Making Beauty Products Safer

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Many Black women and girls use synthetic hair extensions as a long-lasting way to enhance their braided hairstyles. But people who use these products, as well as professional hair braiders, have long reported negative skin reactions, prompting CR to investigate.

What we found was concerning: Every one of the 10 popular synthetic braiding hair products we tested contained potentially dangerous chemicals, including substances linked to cancer, immune system suppression, and other serious health risks. That's especially troubling because these braids are often worn for weeks at a time, exposing consumers to toxic chemicals for prolonged periods.

WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

CR is working to get toxic chemicals out of synthetic braiding hair. We know it's possible because, though every product we tested contained harmful substances, some had lower levels of them, while others didn't contain specific toxins like benzene and lead. In other words, companies can do better.

So we're trying to build momentum for both federal and state-level policies that will help make that happen. In New York, for example, the proposed Beauty Justice Act would ban some of the most toxic substances found in personal care and cosmetic products sold in the state. And we're pushing federal regulators to take action as well.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Sign our petition at **CR.org/hairbraids** to join us in calling on the Food and Drug Administration to force companies to get dangerous chemicals out of these products. CR is urging the FDA to investigate synthetic braiding hair and to limit the use of certain chemicals, especially known carcinogens such as benzene and heavy metals such as lead. The FDA should also require companies to disclose full lists of all ingredients, so consumers have the information they need to understand the potential hazards of these beauty products.

Stopping AI Fraud

CR recently published a report showing how easy it is to use off-the-shelf artificial intelligence-based software to clone a voice without the person's consent. Such "deepfakes" open the door to financial fraud, including the so-called Grandparent Scam, where an unsuspecting older adult gets a frantic phone call from an imposter claiming to be a family member and saying they need money, fast, to get out of a jam.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Sign our petition at **CR.org/voiceclones** to urge federal officials to protect consumers from impersonation scams and to hold companies accountable if they facilitate these frauds.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

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Our March 2025 cover story, **"CR's Anti-Scam Guide,"** revealed the tricks fraudsters use to make their schemes more convincing, plus the best ways to protect yourself. Readers shared their thoughts about the article and others in the March and April issues. Read our responses here.

I FOUND THE information on scams both alarming and invaluable. But the section for those of us still using paper checks didn't go far enough in how to make them safer. The type of ink the check is written with makes a big difference. Several months ago, inspired by Consumer Reports, I decided to conduct a small experiment of my own. Using a common household solvent (acetone), I tested the efficacy of various pen inks in resisting "washing." I selected a range of pens, wrote some text on paper, and allowed the ink dry for a day. To my surprise, the results varied significantly. Some inks dissolved almost instantly, leaving the check vulnerable to alteration. However, I found that gel pens performed exceptionally well. The ink proved resistant to the solvent and did not smudge or dissolve, providing a much higher level of security against check washing.
–Paul Tennis, Boston

EDITOR'S NOTE *We're impressed that you undertook your own CR-style testing project. The United States Postal Inspection Service also recommends using gel pens when writing checks because the ink has characteristics that are more difficult to wash off. It also suggests a few other practical steps. If possible, drop off your mail inside a post office. If you need to use one of the blue collection boxes outside, do so as close as possible to the last pickup of the day. The inspection service also says you should try to retrieve your mail as soon as possible from your home mailbox and, if you go away on vacation, request to have your mail held at your local post office.*

YOUR REPORT ON scams seems to imply that a bank customer has liability for an altered check. This is incorrect. Under the Uniform Commercial Code, adopted by all 50 states and the District of Columbia, a bank customer almost never has liability for an altered check. (There are exceptions for delayed reporting and customer negligence.) Instead, the customer's bank has liability, and can make a claim against the depository bank. Unfortunately, I had to make a claim against my bank for an altered check last fall (my first problem ever using a check) and had no problem getting the several thousand dollars stolen from my account credited back to me.
–Brett Gold, New York City

EDITOR'S NOTE *You're correct that the payee bank (the one holding the account of the person likely to have committed the check fraud) is responsible for reimbursing the withdrawn funds. If you're the victim of check fraud, the American Bankers Association, an industry group, says you should file a report with your own bank, your local police department, and the United States Postal Inspection Service (uspis.gov/report or 877-876-2455).*

WRITE

Go to **CR.org/lettertoeditor** to share your comments for publication.

NOISE FROM INDUCTION RANGES

I WAS PLEASED to see "Pick the Right Range for You" in your March issue. I have a 27-year-old coil-top electric range whose days are probably numbered. But you failed to mention a major drawback of induction ranges: They can create an electromagnetic field that interferes with the function of cochlear implants. My devices screeched nonstop at a friend's dinner party last year.
–Jean Schwind, Mebane, NC

EDITOR'S NOTE *We spoke to an audiologist who confirmed that certain cochlear implants will respond to an induction stove or cooktop as you described. That's because hearing devices and induction appliances create magnetic fields, and interference between them can produce a screeching sound. Also, although induction technology operates on a frequency that the human ear typically can't detect, that isn't the case when you use an electrical device to improve hearing. And it's not just implants: Hearing aids that use a telecoil can also react to induction appliances. An audiologist can confirm whether a particular hearing aid uses this technology, or the information can be found in the owner's manual that comes with hearing aids. (For much more on hearing aids, see "Hear Everything Better," on page 44.)*

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MATTRESS OPTIONS

REGARDING "THE BEST Mattresses for Your Body" in the March issue: My husband and I have vastly different sleeping requirements, so we want to buy a "split king." Do you test those?
–Edith Reese, Mundelein, IL

EDITOR'S NOTE *We test only queen-size mattresses, but other sizes tend to perform similarly. A split king can refer to two twin-size mattresses placed next to each other–an arrangement that gives each partner the mattress style they prefer but leaves a slight separation in the middle–or a single king-size mattress that's split at the head. Instead, consider a mattress that lets you customize the firmness of each side separately, such as the Sleep Number P6, Bob-o-Pedic Treasure Cushion Dual, or Bedgear M3 Performance.*

NEW-MODEL RELIABILITY

IN "THE MOST and Least Reliable New Cars" in the March issue, I noticed that the redesigned Subaru Forester has a reliability score of 98. However, in the same article you mention that it's usually not wise to buy an all-new model. How does CR devise the "predicted" reliability score for a new model?
–Gerald Stanley, Watkinsville, GA

EDITOR'S NOTE *The redesigned Subaru Forester went on sale in spring 2024, allowing us time to collect sufficient 2025 model data from our members to inform our prediction. Factoring in the reliability of the previous Forester–which was similar–we calculated predicted reliability to be well above average. But our general advice still stands: Reliability tends to improve on all models after a year or two of production. That allows time for problems to be discovered and solutions to be engineered and incorporated into production.*

WHERE'S MY FAVORITE BRAND?

Duke's mayonnaise was missing from the mayo comparison in "Grocery Store Staples We Love" in the March issue. Hellmann's might be the gold standard in Yonkers, but down South, without Duke's we'd go bonkers.
—Stewart Waller, Raleigh, NC

EDITOR'S NOTE
Whenever we compare grocery store products, we hear from readers like you who wish we'd included their favorite brands. And we get it! We wish we could test every regional standby, too. But to appeal to the widest group of readers, we cover big national brands available in stores located in multiple regions across the U.S. That means we inevitably leave out some beloved products—like Duke's mayo.

COMPARING MPG RESULTS

REGARDING "NEW CAR RATINGS" in the April issue: I was comparing the 2025 Toyota Corolla Cross XLE standard engine with a Mazda CX-30 premium plus. The EPA's reported miles per gallon on the sticker were much higher than what CR lists. Why?
–Eric Goodman, Coral Springs, FL

EDITOR'S NOTE *CR's test results and the ones from the Environmental Protection Agency show that the Corolla Cross has a 1-mpg advantage over the CX-30 (when combining city and highway test results). But you're right that the actual numbers are different. We conduct our highway tests on public roads at 70 mph, while the EPA uses a lab-based evaluation at a lower speed. Our city cycle is done at our Auto Test Center on a specific course, with varied speeds. But CR's overall result is similar to the EPA's combined number, regardless of differences in city and highway results. Need more help making your decision? Consider factors such as acceleration (advantage, CX-30), driving position (Corolla Cross), braking (Corolla Cross), and front-seat comfort (CX-30).*

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Door Locks

WE TESTED: 91 models
WE TEST FOR: A model's ability to withstand a door being kicked in or the lock being picked or drilled, how convenient smart features are to use, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 49
Range: 12-96

HIGH-SECURITY CHOICE
Bowley Lock Grade 2 $150

94 OVERALL SCORE

SMART WIFI MODEL
Yale Assure Lock 2 YRD450-WF1-BSP $260

84 OVERALL SCORE

BUDGET-FRIENDLY OPTION
Kwikset Juno 991J15SMTCP $50

80 OVERALL SCORE

All-Season Tires

WE TESTED: 22 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a tire brakes in wet and dry conditions, how long its tread lasts, ride smoothness and quietness, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 61
Range: 53-68

TOP-RATED & LONG TREAD LIFE
Michelin Defender2 $187

68 OVERALL SCORE

SMOOTH RIDE & GOOD ON ICE
Vredestein Quatrac Pro+ $144

67 OVERALL SCORE

NICE PRICE
Kumho Solus TA51a $139

62 OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

If I get a flat tire, do I need to replace all four?

IT DEPENDS ON your car's drivetrain type and the condition of your tires. Many all-wheel-drive cars need all four tires to have similar tread depth to work properly, so in that case it's best to replace them at the same time. But with front- or rear-drive cars, ask your tire shop technician how worn down the tread is on your other tires. If they're only 30 percent worn or less, then replacing just one is okay, says Ryan Pszczolkowski, who leads CR's tire testing program. If they're 40 to 50 percent worn, it's better to buy two new tires that match the models you already have. Put them on the rear axle, which helps to maintain safer handling. And if the tires are 70 percent worn or more, replace all four.

ILLUSTRATION: JOSEPH CARRINGTON

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For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org.**

Portable Bluetooth Speakers

WE TESTED: 112 models
WE TEST FOR: Sound quality and versatility, which evaluates the presence of useful features.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 48
Range: 20-67

SUPERIOR SOUND
Ultimate Ears Hyperboom $400

67 OVERALL SCORE

GOOD VALUE
Klipsch Nashville $150

63 OVERALL SCORE

LIGHTWEIGHT FOR TRAVELING
Ultimate Ears Megaboom 4 $150

61 OVERALL SCORE

Mirrorless Cameras for $1,600 or Less

WE TESTED: 31 models
WE TEST FOR: Image quality with a flash and without; video quality; ease of use, including the camera controls and focusing; battery life; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 75
Range: 65-82

TOP OVERALL
Leica D-Lux 8 $1,595

77 OVERALL SCORE

EASY TO TOTE
Fujifilm X-T50 w/15-45mm $1,500

75 OVERALL SCORE

A GREAT DEAL
Panasonic Lumix DC-G100D w/12-32mm $750

73 OVERALL SCORE

Toasters for $40 or Less

WE TESTED: 38 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a toaster can make both very light and very dark toast, how fast it can toast a full batch of bread, how easy it is to use and clean, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 75
Range: 63-91

BEST FOR BAGELS
Dash Clear View DVTS501GY $40

85 OVERALL SCORE

INTUITIVE CONTROLS
Hamilton Beach 22910 2-Slice $22

84 OVERALL SCORE

BARGAIN BUY
Ovente TP2210 2-Slice $15

78 OVERALL SCORE

Child Car Seats

WE TESTED: 88 infant and booster seats
WE TEST FOR: Crash protection; ease of use, including buckle and clip adjustment; secure installation; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 63
Range: 7-91

BEST OVERALL FOR INFANTS
Clek Liing $480

91 OVERALL SCORE

EASY TO INSTALL INFANT SEAT
Graco Premier SnugRide SnugFit 35 XT (Load Leg Technology) $350

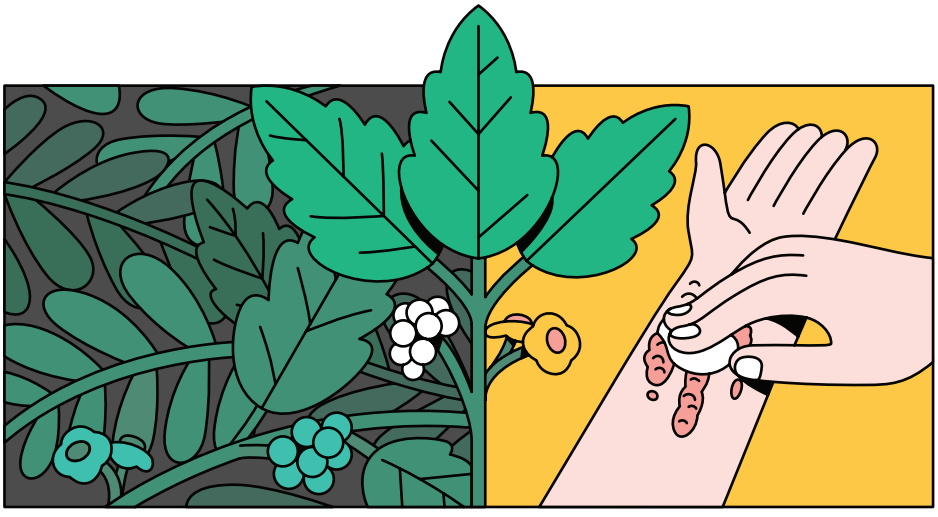
89 OVERALL SCORE

BEST BOOSTER SEAT
Chicco KidFit Zip Air Plus 2-in-1 $170

74 OVERALL SCORE

Note: We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.

COMING NEXT MONTH Hair Dryers & More



What's the best way to treat a poison ivy rash?

POISON IVY, along with poison oak and poison sumac plants, has an oily coating called urushiol, which often causes redness, swelling, and severe itching within 4 to 48 hours after contact with your skin. Eventually, a rash, often with fluid-filled blisters, can emerge in a line or in streaks.

If you think you've touched a poisonous plant, scrub your skin with soap and water–ideally within 20 minutes of contact–to help remove the oil and help prevent a rash. (Not everyone develops a rash, but don't wait to find out.) Be sure to wash the clothes you were wearing, too. Residual plant oils can linger on many surfaces until they're washed, and they could cause a reaction if you touch them.

If a rash appears, try an oatmeal bath, cool compresses, calamine lotion, or an over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream to relieve the itch. Scratching the affected skin won't spread the rash, but try not to; it can lead to further irritation or infection. The rash typically lasts two to three weeks. If home treatments aren't helping, ask your doctor about the possibility of a prescription-strength topical steroid cream.

To help avoid a brush with urushiol in the future, learn what these plants look like. Poison ivy and poison oak are vines or bushes with leaves grouped in threes. They may have yellow or green flowers and white, yellowish-green, or amber berries. Poison sumac is a woody shrub with leaves grouped in sets of seven to 13 and arranged in pairs. It may have pale-yellow or cream-colored berries. Urushiol can also hitchhike on gardening tools and gloves, clothing, shoes–even your pet's fur–and then be transmitted to you by touch. So regularly wash these with soapy water or wipe nonwashable items with rubbing alcohol.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at **CR.org/askourexperts** … and watch for the answers.

Which type of car upholstery holds up best: Cloth, leather, or leatherette?

CLOTH IS BY FAR the most budget-friendly seat material, but it's also the most likely to absorb and show dirt. Real leather has a more luxurious look and feel, and usually has a factory-applied protective finish that helps it resist stains. It can stand up well to wear if you maintain it properly. You'll need to clean and condition the leather to prevent cracking, scratching, and fading.

Faux leather–often referred to as vegan leather, leatherette, or by brand names like MB-Tex (Mercedes-Benz), SensaTec (BMW), and SofTex (Toyota)–is the easiest to keep looking fresh. Typically made from vinyl, it's more stain-resistant than real leather or cloth–most spills can be easily wiped off–and almost maintenance-free. It's also less expensive than real leather.

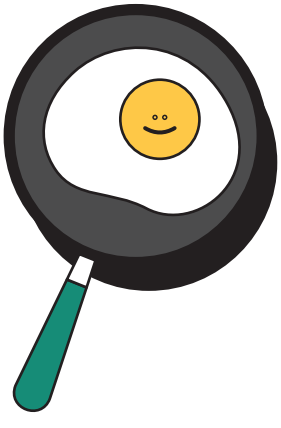
Leatherette does have some drawbacks. It's stiffer and more plasticky than cloth, and because of how readily vinyl absorbs heat, it can get very hot in the sun. If you live in a warm climate and want leatherette, consider opting for ventilated seats, which blow air through perforations to help cool you.

Can I get bird flu from eating eggs or poultry?

IT'S UNLIKELY. Most of the people who have become ill in the current avian influenza outbreak are agricultural workers who were exposed to infected animals. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, you're at risk if the virus (aka H5N1) gets into your eyes, nose, or mouth, or is inhaled. But consuming it through cooked foods like eggs or poultry isn't likely to make you sick. To be safer, though, you should cook poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165° F.

It's not just chicken products that you should be cautious about, either: The virus has spread to cattle, too. So it's important to cook ground beef to 160° F and cuts of beef to 145° F. You should also scrub any cutting boards and cooking utensils thoroughly after use.

When it comes to food that usually isn't cooked, like dairy, it's important to avoid unpasteurized raw milk and any products made from raw milk, such as some soft cheese, ice cream, and yogurt. Pasteurization, which briefly heats milk to a high temperature, inactivates influenza viruses, so even if the virus is present in pasteurized dairy products, it can't infect you or make you sick.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSEPH CARRINGTON

IN THE KNOW

Do 'Eraser' Sponges Really Work?

When you need a little more scrubbing oomph than you can get from a regular sponge, you might reach for an "eraser" sponge. These mildly abrasive pads, typically made of melamine foam and activated with plain water, often go by the name "magic eraser" in homage to the Mr. Clean Magic Eraser, one of the first of the type on the market.

Now, a new crop of competitors has emerged to give Mr. Clean a run for its money. So we rolled up our sleeves and tested them on tough jobs: removing crayon marks from walls and baseboards, getting soap scum off grout, wiping sticky residue from mirrors, and de-scuffing some icky old sneakers.

After all that cleaning, we found many strong contenders that really do erase stains and dirt–and a newcomer that rose to the top: Moxie's Extra Strength Eraser Pads (shown below). We also found a low-priced pick that's great for tough bathroom tasks. Here's a look at the winners of our scrub-off.

PHOTO: BEN GOLDSTEIN; PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (SHOE). PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (PACKAGING)

EDITOR'S PICK

Moxie Extra Strength Eraser Pads $3.98

This dense sponge didn't rip or warp, no matter the cleaning task. It was abrasive but gentle, getting marks off walls quicker than the others we tested, and it didn't mar the painted surface. It was also excellent at removing scuffs and dirt from old sneakers.

RUNNER-UP

Mr. Clean Magic Eraser $3.68

A solid sponge that tackled every cleaning challenge well, the original eraser became warped and began to tear with extended use. It's still an excellent, versatile tool for dirty jobs—but it wasn't the top performer or the best value in our tests.

GREAT ON GROUT

Scrub Daddy Eraser Daddy Essentials $2.50

This was the sturdiest sponge of all, making it a good choice for the toughest cleaning jobs, like getting rid of soap scum on your bathroom's grout or lifting sticker residue off a mirror. But it didn't clean stains off painted walls as well as the other eraser sponges we tried.

For more reviews of eraser sponges we tested, go to ***CR.org/eraser-sponges****.*

MONEY SAVER

Keep Cool for Less

There's no debate about it: Air conditioning is pricey. But adding a well-placed fan in a stuffy room or using a smart controller to optimize your window AC can help you beat the heat—and trim your electric bill.

SMART AC CONTROLLER

Mysa Smart $140

86 OVERALL SCORE

Plugging this device into a wall outlet will let you use the Mysa phone app to control any window AC unit or mini-split that has an infrared remote. Then, with a few taps, you can turn the AC on or off, change the temperature, set a schedule, and more.

BEST TABLETOP FAN

Vornado Flippi V6 Personal Air Circulator $18

This tabletop model earned first place in our tests, delivering a stream of air that's perfect for keeping one person cool. It's quiet and easy to adjust, and used less energy than any of the other small fans we tested.

EFFICIENT CEILING FAN

Westinghouse Comet Indoor 52" $117

86 OVERALL SCORE

Running a ceiling fan—like this top-scoring model—counter-clockwise lets you raise your thermostat by about 4 degrees and feel just as comfortable. It's an energy saver, even if you have central air.

POWERFUL PEDESTAL FAN

Dreo Air Circulator PolyFan 311 $90

Powerful yet energy-efficient, this oscillating fan can help to cool a larger space like a living room or bedroom. In addition to a remote control, it has a digital display and adjusts up and down, from 35.75 to 40 inches.

CR Time Traveler BIG DEALS

1939 We test bath towels for durability and find that many shrink or tear quickly. A Ward's Pride towel is the strongest of the bunch—and costs just 35 cents.

1945 CR tests 24 machine and motor oils. Our top pick is a Gulf Motor Oil (3.8 cents an ounce), but SAE 20 automobile oil, at only 7 cents an ounce, is the better deal.

1959 Frozen dinners are newly popular. We test 17 brands and find that Banquet offers the best-tasting fried chicken, roast turkey, and pot roast dinners—for less.

1961 We test 47 vacuum cleaners and find that only one is a real deal: the Hoover Convertible Special 31. It's quiet and cleans well, for just $65.

1979 Shopping for a camera? Our testers say this excellent 35mm Olympus SLR is a deal. At $608, it's less pricey than other models in its class.

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

TECH UPDATE

Make Your Phone Easier to Use

Struggling to hear conversations and videos? Frustrated by typing and tapping to find the app or info you want? These three settings can help.

Try Voice Commands to Type Less

Voice assistants like Siri and Google can do a lot more than tell you the weather—they can help you use your phone hands-free (and spend less time tapping on those tiny buttons). For example, you could use an assistant to quickly find certain emails in your inbox. Say: "Hey Siri, find emails received on July 5th" or "Siri, find emails from Sally Smith." Then you can select one and ask Siri to read it to you, or craft a reply. **If you don't have Siri activated on your iPhone,** go to Settings > Siri > Talk to Siri. **On an Android,** open the Google Assistant app and tap "Turn on."

Add Captions to Your Calls, Videos, and More

When you turn on Live Captions, you'll be able to read any speech coming from your phone's speakers, from podcasts and videos to phone calls and even FaceTime chats. That can be a big help on long calls or if you're in a place with lots of background noise or don't want to turn up the volume. **On an iPhone,** go to Settings > Accessibility and toggle on Live Captions. Then scroll down to toggle on the FaceTime switch. **On an Android phone,** go to Settings > Accessibility > Hearing Enhancements > Live Captions and select OK.

Create Personalized Shortcuts

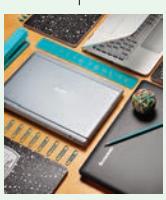
If you have limited dexterity or just want to get to certain apps and settings faster, Apple's AssistiveTouch feature adds a multifunctional menu button (that looks like a small circle) to your iPhone's screen. You can customize it to bring you to specific apps and settings with just a tap or double tap. **To activate AssistiveTouch,** go to Settings > Accessibility > Touch, then toggle on AssistiveTouch. You'll see prompts to personalize the tool, too. For example, you could include a shortcut to turn on Live Captions (see box at left) so that you don't need to search for that setting.

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS

1981 This electric hedge trimmer from Sears earns top marks for its smooth, quick cuts and easy-to-grip handle—and it's less expensive than several others we tested.

1996 We review small sedans from Chrysler, GM, Honda, and Suzuki, and say that the budget-friendly Honda Civic LX, above, is the best choice by a mile.

2015 In our ratings of new laptops, this Acer model hits the sweet spot. It's speedy with superb battery life and costs only $500.



2021 At just 25 cents an ounce, this great-tasting Bolthouse Farms Classic Ranch Yogurt Dressing is a third of the cost of some others we tried.

2025 This Samsung TV has superb picture quality and wide viewing angles for much less than other top models, making it a better deal.

Samsung QN65QN90D
$1,400

80 OVERALL SCORE

For the best deals in cars, tech gear, kitchen essentials, and more, turn to page 24.

PET UPDATE

Is Your Dog's Food Safe?

Keeping your pet happy and healthy is job one. But it's hard to know which type of food is the healthiest choice. And how can you tell if what you're putting in your dog's dish contains what the label claims–or even if it's safe?

To find out, CR tested 58 dog foods–bags of kibble, canned food, and frozen raw foods–for contaminants like salmonella and listeria, as well as common beneficial nutrients that appear on product labels.

Our testing revealed mostly good news. The vast majority of foods were safe and met veterinarian recommendations for nutrients like fat, protein, and vitamin D, and none contained salmonella bacteria.

One worrisome caveat: Some frozen raw dog foods contained listeria, which could make your dog sick (see the box below). Raw dog foods have become trendy, but the American Veterinary Medical Association does not recommend raw food diets, and is concerned about risks for bacteria and parasites that can harm pets or people, says president Sandra Faeh, DVM. Plus, they tend to be pricey. The raw foods we tested averaged $23.25 per pound, while the dry foods cost just $1.57 per pound, on average.

For the healthiest picks, look for labels that say they provide "a complete and balanced" diet and meet standards set by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO). In general, foods for adult dogs that are not pregnant or lactating should contain at least 18 percent protein and 5.5 percent fat, per AAFCO. The AAFCO guidelines also recommend between 500 and 3,000 IU of vitamin D per kilogram of food. (More than that can lead to kidney failure and even death.) Nutrient needs vary by dog breed and age, so consult your veterinarian for advice.

TWO FOODS THAT FAILED OUR TESTS

CR's testing found Listeria monocytogenes, a bacteria known to cause illness, in samples of the frozen raw foods for dogs shown at right.*

Raw Bistro Free Range Chicken Entrée

Viva for Dogs Ground Beef Meal

*Raw Bistro told CR that its internal testing of the batch we tested did not indicate contamination, and that the product has since expired and is no longer in circulation. A Viva representative told CR that the products we tested were past their shelf life and are no longer in warehouses.

PHOTOS, THIS PAGE: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS. PHOTOS, FACING PAGE: MANUFACTURERS

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Generators

A generator can be a lifesaver during a power outage, keeping the lights on, the WiFi connected, the fridge cold, and more. There are three main types: portable, inverter, and home standby. Which you choose depends on what you need it for (and your budget). If you just want the generator to run the essentials–like your fridge, a few lights, and a sump pump–you'll need one with a wattage between 1,400 W and 3,100 W, which our top-rated portable and inverter gas-powered generators, below, can handle easily. If you want to power more than that–like your AC, computer, and TV, too–you'll need more power, around 4,500 W. Or consider investing in a home standby generator, which can operate an entire home–typically 7,000 W to 12,500 W or more.

PORTABLE GENERATORS

As the name indicates, you can move these around. Some are small enough to take on the road for RVing, while others are better kept home as a backup power source.

Firman P03628
$700

81 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 POWER DELIVERY
- 5/5 POWER QUALITY
- 3/5 NOISE
- 4/5 EASE OF USE

CLAIMED OUTPUT **3,650 W** RUN TIME (HR.) **13-24**

Champion 201223
$700

81 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 POWER DELIVERY
- 5/5 POWER QUALITY
- 3/5 NOISE
- 4/5 EASE OF USE

CLAIMED OUTPUT **4,000 W** RUN TIME (HR.) **14-25**

Wen GN5602X
$382

80 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 POWER DELIVERY
- 5/5 POWER QUALITY
- 3/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EASE OF USE

CLAIMED OUTPUT **4,500 W** RUN TIME (HR.) **12-19**

INVERTER GENERATORS

Some can be as small as portable models (try the Champion for tailgating). But they're quieter and more energy-efficient with fewer emissions—and more expensive.

Predator 5000 Watt Dual-Fuel Super Quiet with CO Secure
$1,100

85 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 POWER DELIVERY
- 5/5 POWER QUALITY
- 4/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EASE OF USE

CLAIMED OUTPUT **3,900 W** RUN TIME (HR.) **10-22**

Honda EU3000iS with CO-Minder
$2,000

85 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 POWER DELIVERY
- 5/5 POWER QUALITY
- 5/5 NOISE
- 4/5 EASE OF USE

CLAIMED OUTPUT **2,800 W** RUN TIME (HR.) **10-25**

Champion 201317
$490

80 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 POWER DELIVERY
- 5/5 POWER QUALITY
- 5/5 NOISE
- 4/5 EASE OF USE

CLAIMED OUTPUT **1,850 W** RUN TIME (HR.) **5-11**

HOME STANDBY GENERATORS

These run on natural gas or propane and turn on automatically during an outage. But they need to be installed by a pro, which can cost as much as the generator itself.

Champion 100177
$3,200

93 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 POWER DELIVERY
- 5/5 POWER QUALITY
- 3/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EASE OF USE

CLAIMED OUTPUT **7,500 W** RUN TIME (HR.) **247-386**

Winco PSS8B
$5,000

92 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 POWER DELIVERY
- 5/5 POWER QUALITY
- 3/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EASE OF USE

CLAIMED OUTPUT **7,600 W** RUN TIME (HR.) **221-294**

Generac 7224
$5,039

89 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 POWER DELIVERY
- 5/5 POWER QUALITY
- 3/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EASE OF USE

CLAIMED OUTPUT **14,000 W** RUN TIME (HR.) **125-188**

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

FOOD IQ™

The Best Salsas

Homemade salsa is hard to beat, but grocery store versions can be surprisingly flavorful–as we discovered in our blind taste test of medium-heat salsas. All the products we tried were low in calories–just 10 per serving–with 0 grams of fat, but we found big differences in the flavor, spice levels, and how much sodium they had. Here are the jars that stood out, and one to leave on the shelf.

BEST TASTING

Tostitos Chunky Salsa Medium
$4.30 for 15.5 ounces

SODIUM **160 mg**

The tomatoes are sweet and the veggies are not mushy—two factors that made this salsa shine in our taste test. The garlic is strong but not overpowering, and it has a nice kick of heat to it.

BARGAIN BUY

Good & Gather (Target) Chunky Salsa Medium
$2.60 for 24 ounces

SODIUM **230 mg**

With a nice balance of tomato, onion, and peppers, this salsa is similar to the Tostitos, but with less garlic and a tad more heat for about half the price. But it's also higher in sodium.

SMOKY FLAVOR

Trader Joe's Organic Thick & Chunky Salsa
$3 for 16 ounces

SODIUM **135 mg**

One of the thickest salsas we tasted, this Trader Joe's option has a robust cayenne pepper heat with smoky flavor to it. It's also a good lower-sodium pick.

MILDER THAN MOST

Casa Mamita (Aldi) Chunky Salsa Medium
$2.50 for 24 ounces

SODIUM **230 mg**

If you prefer a salsa with less heat, you may enjoy this smoother, milder choice. The price is pretty great, too—but like the Good & Gather salsa, it's pretty high in sodium.

HOT STUFF

Kirkland Signature (Costco) Organic Salsa Medium
$10 for two 38-ounce jars

SODIUM **140 mg**

This one has serious heat with strong cumin and smoky chili flavors. Our tasters say the balance of flavors isn't perfect, but if you like a bold salsa, it's worth a try.

SKIP IT

Great Value (Walmart) Thick & Chunky Medium
$2 for 16 ounces

SODIUM **120 mg**

It may be low-priced (and low in sodium), but despite its name we don't think this Walmart salsa is a "great value." Our tasters say it had a somewhat sour flavor of overripe tomatoes and was a little watery.

SCOOP IT UP

Try our staff's favorite chips with your salsa.

Xochitl Mexican Style Salted Corn Chips
$6.50 for 16 ounces

The clean corn flavor, crispy texture, and hit of salt make these a winner on their own or with dip.

Tostitos Scoops Tortilla Chips
$5 for 10 ounces

These chips are great for chunky salsas or bean dips because their bowl shape ensures those veggie bits make it to your mouth.

Garden of Eatin' Yellow Corn Chips
$7 for 16 ounces

Looking for big corn flavor? These beautiful golden yellow chips have it—along with a pleasingly thick and coarse texture.

PHOTO: BEN GOLDSTEIN; PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (BEST SALSAS). PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS (PACKAGING)

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

VOLKSWAGEN VEHICLES

Volkswagen is recalling more than 177,000 Atlas and Atlas Cross Sport SUVs from the 2024 and 2025 model years because if the engine cover is not properly reinstalled after a vehicle service, it could come into contact with a hot surface such as the exhaust or turbocharger. That could increase the risk of melting and/or fire.
What to do: Dealers will remove the plastic engine cover, free of charge. The repair should take less than an hour. Owners can call Volkswagen at 800-893-5298. The NHTSA campaign number for this recall is 25V100.

TESLA CYBERTRUCKS

Tesla is recalling more than 46,000 Cybertrucks from the 2024 and 2025 model years because an exterior trim panel can detach from the vehicle and become a road hazard, increasing the risk of a crash.
What to do: Tesla service will replace the panel, free of charge. Owners may call Tesla at 877-798-3752 and will also be notified by mail. The NHTSA campaign number for this recall is 25V1700.

SEGWAY SCOOTERS

Segway is recalling about 220,000 scooters because the folding mechanism can fail and cause the handlebars or stem to fold while the scooter is in use, posing a fall hazard. The scooters were sold at Best Buy, Costco, Target, and Walmart, and online at Amazon and segway.com from January 2020 through February 2025 for between $600 and $1,000.
What to do: Stop using the scooters. To determine whether the folding mechanism needs adjustment and for a free maintenance kit, go to service.segway.com/us-en/recall or call 800-914-6110.

PORTABLE POWER BANKS

VC Group is recalling about 89,500 MagSafe wireless portable power banks because the lithium-ion battery inside can overheat and ignite, posing fire and burn hazards. The power banks were sold online at Amazon and velvetcaviar.com from November 2022 through October 2024 for about $65.
What to do: Stop using the power banks. Email recall@velvetcaviar.com or go to velvetcaviar.com/pages/magsafe-battery-pack-recall for a free replacement.

GAS BOILERS

Triangle Tube is recalling about 60,000 boilers because they can release carbon monoxide (CO) due to delayed ignitions or component damage, posing a risk of serious injury or death. The boilers were manufactured by Burnsen SA, of Belgium, from December 2011 through April 2019 and were sold by wholesale distributors and installed by independent contractors nationwide for between $3,400 and $9,700.
What to do: Call Triangle Tube at 800-200-7820 or go to triangletube.com/products/product-recall to schedule a free boiler inspection and, if applicable, free installation of a new boiler ignition system. Make sure you have a working carbon monoxide alarm on each level of your home and outside sleeping areas if you use the recalled boilers while awaiting repair. Triangle Tube will have one shipped to you for free.

WOOLITE DELICATES DETERGENT

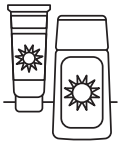
Reckitt is recalling about 16,200 50-fluid-ounce bottles of Woolite Delicates detergent because they can contain pseudomonas species bacteria, posing a serious infection risk to people with weakened immune systems or external medical devices who are exposed through the eyes or a break in the skin. The detergents were sold at Amazon in January 2025 for between $14 and $17.
What to do: Stop using any bottle with the lot code S24364, S24365, or S24366. Call Reckitt at 800-228-4722 or go to woolite.us/voluntary-recall for a refund.

NUBY STROLLER FANS

Luv n' Care is recalling about 33,600 stroller fans because the housing allows small children's fingers to contact the fan's blade, posing a laceration injury hazard. The fans were sold at Baby Express, Burlington Coat Factory, Target, and Unique Photo stores nationwide, and online at Amazon and us.nuby.com from May 2024 through June 2024 for about $15.
What to do: Stop using the fans. Call 800-588-6227 or go to us.nuby.com/pages/fanrecall for a free replacement.

JULY IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

SUNSCREENS



BLOOD PRESSURE MONITORS

AUGUST IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

WIRELESS ROUTERS

DEHUMIDIFIERS

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

Pick the Right Printer for Your Needs

Our test results can help you choose a great model that costs less up front and saves you money on ink or toner, too.

by Allen St. John

Budget-Smart Tank Model

Epson EcoTank ET-4810 $299

58 OVERALL SCORE

Because it uses less pricey bottles of ink instead of cartridges, ink costs are just $4 a year.

EVEN THOUGH WE live in what seems like a paperless age, it's surprising how often you still need a good printer. Tax forms, legal documents, event tickets, recipes, boarding passes, photos—the list of things you want to print goes on and on. And it's inconvenient to ask a friend (or head to Staples) every time you do. So you probably want to have a printer at home. But paying a lot for a device you don't use every day doesn't make sense. And then there's the ink, which can be shockingly expensive.

Beyond the price differences, printers have varied strengths. Some models turn out quality photos. Others deliver razor-sharp text. Some offer decent prints while using less ink. (Still others underperform across the board.) The smart move is to match the printer you buy to the way you print and factor in the cost of ink from the start. With this in mind, we have shopping advice tailored to different printing needs. We also share tips on how to save money when you first buy your printer and how to spend less on ink.

If You Only Print the Occasional Return Label

Don't print often? Then you may be a good candidate for an inexpensive inkjet printer. They sell for as little as $80, and they're pretty versatile. The best of them deliver good-quality text, graphics, and photos in either black and white or color.

Be careful as you shop, though, because the cost of ownership for a model with a low up-front price can quickly climb once you start emptying and replacing ink cartridges.

The HP Envy Inspire 7255e looks like a bargain at $130, for example. But based on typical use—27 printed pages per month, according to our member surveys—the annual ink cost for the model is about $109. That makes the four-year cost of ownership a substantial $566, according to CR's calculations.

If you print much less than that, your ink costs will be lower. But they can still add up faster than you'd think. By comparison, the Brother MFC-J6540DW costs more than twice as much as that HP printer up front ($280) but uses less ink and would set you back just $460 over four years. For help in selecting a frugal model, consult the annual ink costs in the ratings charts starting on page 21.

If You Print More Often *(But Not in Color)*

Contracts, financial statements, boarding passes, the occasional personal letter. If you mostly print text documents, a black-and-white laser printer is a good choice.

These turn out crisp, clear text at a rapid clip. They tend to be more reliable and satisfying to own than inkjet models, according to our member surveys. And best of all, they use toner cartridges, which are pricey up front but cheaper over time than inkjet cartridges.

For example, the Brother HL-L2480DW carries a middle-of-the-road price of $220. That's more expensive than many inkjets, but the cost for toner is only $15 per year, according to CR estimates. And that makes the four-year cost of ownership just $280.

There are color lasers, too, but most people really don't need one. They're expensive to buy—from around $220 to $700—and quite pricey to operate because they require four toner cartridges.

They're best suited to small businesses that are willing to pay for top-notch print quality.

MORE GREAT OPTIONS

Good All-Around Inkjet

Brother MFC-J1010DW $100

57 OVERALL SCORE

This inkjet is a good low-priced model. Its estimated annual ink cost is a relatively modest $77 per year.

Fast Laser Printer

Canon imageClass MF273dw $160

65 OVERALL SCORE

This black-and-white laser provides crisp text and strong reliability scores. CR's estimated toner cost is just $17 per year.

PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN GOLDSTEIN

If You Print Anything and Everything

If you find yourself with frequent color print jobs (so a black-and-white laser won't work for you), consider a tank printer. These inkjets don't use cartridges. Instead they have reservoirs that you fill with ink sold in a bottle. For as little as $12 for each color (black, cyan, magenta, and yellow), you get enough ink to last a couple of years or more. Pouring the ink into the reservoirs does require a little more care than changing the cartridges in a regular inkjet, though.

Compared with regular inkjets, the long-term savings from a tank printer can be huge. For example, HP's EcoTank ET-2840 Special Edition costs $180 and the estimated ink cost is just $4 a year. That makes the four-year cost of ownership $196, which is a fraction of what you could end up spending on a printer with costly ink cartridges.

Ways to Save on Any Model

In our ratings that start on the facing page, we list the annual cost for ink or toner. Those estimates are calculated using our test results and survey data on typical use by CR members. That info can help you find a model that's not only inexpensive to buy but also inexpensive to operate.

August is a good time to shop, thanks to back-to-school deals. You'll find bargains in November and December, too.

And here's one last money-saving tip: Don't be tempted to buy more printer than you need. Most shoppers opt for all-in-one models with built-in scanners, copiers, and fax functions. And while it's nice to have an entire office in a box on your desk, if you rarely scan or copy documents, you can save some money by buying a basic printer.

Case in point: The Canon imageClass LBP172dw, a black-and-white laser, works well and sells for $149. The estimated toner cost? Only $12 per year.

HOW TO SPEND LESS ON INK

Printer ink in cartridges is expensive—really expensive. These days, black ink sells for an average of $73 an ounce—six times the price of Dom Pérignon Champagne. Here are five ways to keep costs down.

Ink Subscriptions

Brother, Canon, Epson, and HP offer plans that deliver discounted ink straight to your door. There are two types. An auto-replenishment plan provides ink based on your printer's actual usage. With a print plan, you pay a monthly fee for a set number of pages. That can save you more—up to 50 or 70 percent, according to HP and Canon—but only if you stay within the page limits. Additional pages are quite expensive.

Third-Party Ink

Amazon and other retailers sell bargain-priced ink made by independent companies (as opposed to printer makers). For example, this spring, a black ink cartridge for a printer in our ratings sold for just $11 compared with $28 for the printer's official cartridge.

In a recent nationally representative CR survey, 69 percent of those who used aftermarket cartridges reported that they were just as good as or better than name-brand ink. Only 22 percent said they were worse. But tread carefully. Some printers work just fine with aftermarket ink. Others won't run when a computer chip inside the printer detects an off-brand cartridge.

Draft Mode

Most printers have a draft mode that conserves ink by printing at a lower quality. That works well for a label, but remember to change the setting back to normal before you print, say, party invitations.

Preview

Before you hit the Print button, preview the job to make sure you won't be churning out pages of ads and logos. The Print Current Page setting can help you produce only what you really need.

Frugal Fonts

The default fonts on word processing programs often use a lot of ink. Our testers got 27 percent more mileage by shifting from Arial to Times New Roman. In the same trial, Calibri and Century Gothic used less ink than Arial.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE TOM AGENCY

Ratings › **Think Ahead** Before you spend money on a printer, consider how much it will cost to keep it running, too. In the chart below, we list annual estimates for ink and toner, based on our test and survey data.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Pricing		Survey Results		Test Results								Features		
		Printer	Ink cost/year	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Text quality	Text speed	Graphics quality	Photo quality	Maintenance ink use	Scan quality	Versatility	Ease of use	Standard sheet capacity	Auto-duplex printing	Can still print if a color is empty
ALL-IN-ONE CARTRIDGE INKJET PRINTERS																
Brother MFC-J6940DW	61	$350	$59											250	●	
Brother MFC-J6540DW	58	$280	$45											250	●	
Brother MFC-J1800DW	58	$200	$89											150	●	
Brother MFC-J1010DW	57	$100	$77											150	●	
Canon Pixma TR7820	56	$100	$66											100	●	●
Canon Pixma TS8820	56	$230	$95											100	●	
HP OfficeJet 250 Mobile	55	$390	$89											50		●
Canon Pixma TS7720	54	$80	$68											100	●	●
Epson WorkForce Pro WF-3823	54	$150	$76											250	●	●
Brother MFC-J1170DW	53	$130	$160											150	●	
HP OfficeJet Pro 9730e	53	$290	$58											250	●	●
Epson WorkForce Pro WF-7820	53	$180	$115											250	●	●
HP Envy Inspire 7255e	53	$130	$109											125	●	●
HP OfficeJet Pro 9135e	53	$300	$66											250	●	●
Canon Pixma TS9520a	53	$200	$232											100	●	●
HP OfficeJet Pro 9125e	52	$200	$63											250	●	●
Canon Pixma TR7020a	51	$100	$107											100	●	●
HP OfficeJet Pro 8015e	50	$160	$136											225	●	●
ALL-IN-ONE BLACK-AND-WHITE LASER PRINTERS																
Brother MFC-L5915DW	76	$530	$9						NA					250	●	NA
Brother HL-L2480DW	72	$220	$15						NA					250	●	NA
Canon imageClass MF465dw	72	$300	$12						NA					250	●	NA
Brother DCP-L2640DW	71	$200	$15						NA					250	●	NA
Brother MFC-L2820DW	70	$250	$15						NA					250	●	NA
Brother MFC-L2900DW	70	$270	$15						NA					250	●	NA
Brother MFC-L2807DW	69	$250	$15						NA					250	●	NA
Brother MFC-L2760DW	68	$190	$15						NA					250	●	NA
Canon imageClass MF287dw	67	$250	$14						NA					250	●	NA
Canon imageClass MF273dw	65	$160	$17						NA					150	●	NA
Canon imageClass MF267dw II	65	$259	$14						NA					250	●	NA

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY | CR GREEN CHOICE

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Pricing		Survey Results		Test Results								Features		
		Printer	Ink cost/year	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Text quality	Text speed	Graphics quality	Photo quality	Maintenance ink use	Scan quality	Versatility	Ease of use	Standard sheet capacity	Auto-duplex printing	Can still print if a color is empty
ALL-IN-ONE BLACK-AND-WHITE LASER PRINTERS *Continued*																
Canon imageClass D1620	64	$430	$13						NA					550	●	NA
Canon imageClass MF275dw	64	$210	$15						NA					150	●	NA
Canon imageClass MF269dw II VP	64	$369	$14						NA					250	●	NA
HP LaserJet MFP M234sdw	59	$230	$15						NA					150	●	NA
HP LaserJet MFP M235dwe	54	$110	$15						NA					150	●	NA
ALL-IN-ONE TANK INKJET PRINTERS																
Epson EcoTank Photo ET-8500	60	$580	$7											100	●	NA
Epson EcoTank ET-4810	58	$299	$4											100		NA
Epson EcoTank ET-3843	58	$300	$4											250	●	NA
Epson EcoTank ET-2840 Special Edition	56	$180	$4											100		NA
HP Smart Tank 7602	56	$350	$3											250	●	NA
Epson EcoTank Pro ET-5170	54	$550	$7											250	●	NA
Epson EcoTank Pro ET-5180	54	$600	$7											250	●	NA
Epson EcoTank ET-4850	54	$500	$4											250	●	NA
Epson EcoTank ET-2400	54	$159	$4											100		NA
HP Smart Tank 7302	54	$350	$3											250	●	NA
Epson EcoTank ET-4800	53	$240	$4											100		NA
Epson EcoTank ET-3830	53	$300	$4											250	●	NA
Epson EcoTank ET-3850	53	$320	$4											250	●	NA
Epson EcoTank ET-15000	53	$600	$4											250	●	NA
REGULAR CARTRIDGE INKJET PRINTERS																
Canon Pixma TS302a	51	$70	$107								NA			60		●
Canon Pixma iP8720	50	$230	$127								NA			150		
Epson WorkForce Pro WF-7310	50	$250	$63								NA			250	●	●
Canon Pixma TS702a	48	$100	$133								NA			250	●	●
HP OfficeJet Pro 9110b	43	$150	$41								NA			250	●	●
Canon Pixma TR150	42	$250	$66								NA			50		●
Canon Pixma Pro-200	36	$500	$101								NA			NA		

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Pricing		Survey Results		Test Results								Features		
		Printer	Ink cost/year	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Text quality	Text speed	Graphics quality	Photo quality	Maintenance ink use	Scan quality	Versatility	Ease of use	Standard sheet capacity	Auto-duplex printing	Can still print if a color is empty
REGULAR BLACK-AND-WHITE LASER PRINTERS																
✓ **Brother** HL-L6310DW	76	$390	$8	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	🔼	➖	520	●	NA
✓ **Canon** imageClass LBP247dw	76	$350	$11	⏫	➖	⏫	⏫	➖	NA	⏫	NA	🔼	🔼	250	●	NA
✓ **Brother** HL-L6217DW	72	$300	$7	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	🔼	🔽	520	●	NA
✓ **Brother** HL-L6210DW	72	$300	$8	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	🔼	🔽	520	●	NA
✓ **Canon** imageClass LBP246dw	72	$230	$11	⏫	➖	⏫	⏫	➖	NA	⏫	NA	🔼	🔽	250	●	NA
Brother HL-L5210DN	70	$280	$8	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	➖	🔽	250	●	NA
Brother HL-L6210DWT	70	$400	$8	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	🔼	🔽	520	●	NA
Brother HL-L2460DW	68	$160	$13	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	➖	🔽	250	●	NA
Canon imageClass LBP172dw	68	$149	$12	⏫	➖	⏫	⏫	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	➖	🔽	250	●	NA
Brother HL-L2405W	67	$120	$13	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	➖	🔽	250		NA
Brother HL-L2420DW	67	$120	$13	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	➖	🔽	250	●	NA
Canon imageClass LBP122dw	66	$100	$13	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	➖	🔽	150	●	NA
Xerox B310/DNI	66	$280	$9	—	—	⏫	⏫	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	🔼	🔽	250	●	NA
Brother HL-L2400D	64	$100	$13	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏬	NA	⏫	NA	➖	⏬	250	●	NA
HP LaserJet Tank 2504dw	63	$320	$2	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	➖	NA	⏫	NA	➖	⏬	250	●	NA
HP LaserJet M209dwe	61	$100	$13	⏫	➖	🔼	⏫	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	➖	⏬	150	●	NA
HP LaserJet Pro 3001dw	60	$140	$12	⏫	➖	⏫	⏫	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	➖	⏬	250	●	NA
HP LaserJet Pro 4001n	58	$200	$11	⏫	➖	⏫	⏫	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	🔽	⏬	250		NA
HP LaserJet M110we	55	$140	$15	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	🔽	NA	⏫	NA	➖	⏬	150		NA
REGULAR TANK INKJET PRINTERS																
Canon MegaTank Pixma G1230	41	$135	$3	🔽	➖	🔼	⏬	🔼	🔼	⏫	NA	🔽	🔽	100		NA
Canon MegaTank Pixma G5020	41	$158	$3	🔽	➖	➖	🔽	➖	🔽	⏫	NA	➖	🔽	250	●	NA

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/printer.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Ink cost/year** is the estimated cost in dollars for ink or toner in a year of typical use, based on our tests and how members told us they print. **Predicted reliability** estimates the likelihood that newly purchased models from a given brand will develop problems or break within the first four years. Findings are from CR's 2022 and 2024 Fall Surveys. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend the printer they bought. In cases where we have insufficient survey data to provide a brand-level rating, indicated by a gray dash (—), the model gets weighted category average scores for reliability and satisfaction. **Text quality** assesses clarity and crispness of black text. **Text speed** reflects how quickly the model can print text on five plain, letter-sized pages. **Graphics quality** assesses the appearance of color graphics produced by the printer or black-and-white graphics for black-and-white lasers. **Photo quality** reflects a photo's appearance. **Maintenance ink use** reflects the amount of extra ink used by an inkjet printer to maintain its print heads. **Scan quality** reflects the appearance of a scanned document with photos and various typefaces. **Versatility** reflects features that expand a printer's utility. **Ease of use** considers how easy the model is to set up and operate. **Price** is approximate retail.

The Better Deal

SAVE

on Cars, Appliances, Mattresses, TVs, and More

BY
THE EDITORS OF
CONSUMER REPORTS

ILLUSTRATIONS
BY TOMMY PARKER

KITCHEN ESSENTIALS
PAGE 26

HOME GOODS
PAGE 28

BIG

It's more important than ever to get the most value for your money. And that's where CR can help. Each year, we test hundreds of products and survey thousands of CR members about their experiences while owning them. Many of those products earn high ratings for their impressive performance—and some are also a really great value. They have most (if not all) of the attributes of more expensive products but at a much lower price. We share these Better Deals on the back page of every issue, and now we're bringing you even more of the great buys you love. Read on for 10 pages of Better Deals on everything from refrigerators to mattresses, TVs to trucks—plus favorite bargains from CR staffers and savings tips from our shopping experts.

HEALTHY LIVING

PAGE 30

TECH GEAR

PAGE 32

CARS, SUVs & TRUCKS

PAGE 34

The Better Deal
KITCHEN ESSENTIALS

SINGLE-SERVE COFFEE MAKERS

KEURIG K-SUPREME PLUS SMART
$129
78 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

INSTANT SOLO SINGLE SERVE
$70
70 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

Both of these single-serve coffee makers brew up your first cup quickly, and they're easy to use, refill, and clean, too. The pricier Keurig outperforms the Instant when it comes to brewing range—it lets users adjust the strength of their coffee—and it has WiFi connectivity, so you can turn it on or off remotely via a smartphone app. But its temperature consistency from cup to cup is not very good. For about $60 less, the Instant is a more consistent brewer, and it accepts both K-Cups and loose grounds.

NONSTICK FRY PANS

GREENPAN PARIS PRO CERAMIC NONSTICK
$100
82 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

BLUE DIAMOND CLASSIC DIAMOND-INFUSED CERAMIC COOKWARE
$30
83 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

The pricey GreenPan aced most of CR's tough tests. It cooks evenly, its handle stays cool, and the manufacturer says it's made without PTFE, a compound with chemicals that may harm your health and the environment. The Blue Diamond pan checks those boxes, too—and did a little better in our nonstick tests: Four eggs slid off its surface easily. Its handle doesn't feel quite as sturdy as the GreenPan's, and the nonstick surface is a bit less durable. But the much lower price outweighs those small drawbacks.

Paul Hope
Lead Editor, Home

MY GREAT BUY!

RANGE

FRIGIDAIRE GALLERY GCFI3060BF
$1,400
93 OVERALL SCORE

I knew I wanted my next range to be an induction model, and I picked this one because it was over $1,000 less than other top tested models. I love how fast it heats–it boils water in minutes, and gets a skillet roaring hot for searing or stir-frying. The oven heats evenly, and I use the air fry setting for broccoli, brussels sprouts, or cauliflower at least twice a week.

SPOT ILLUSTRATIONS: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

FRENCH-DOOR REFRIGERATORS

BOSCH
B36CL81ENW
$4,799

74 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

GE
GFE28GYNFS
$1,999

75 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

These French-door fridges receive nearly identical scores in our tests. The Bosch is a counter-depth model, so it creates a more streamlined effect. It's also a little quieter. For less than half its cost, the full-sized GE has far more storage space, better energy efficiency, and some convenience features that the Bosch lacks, including a through-the-door water and ice dispenser and spillproof shelves.

COUNTERTOP MICROWAVES

BREVILLE
SMOOTH WAVE
BM0850BSS1BUC10
$400

74 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

COMMERCIAL
CHEF CHM990B
$95

74 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

If you want a sleek stainless steel look, the Breville is a great choice. It's also quiet, and our readers have found the brand highly reliable. But the Commercial Chef heats much more evenly—and defrosts just as well as the Breville—for about a quarter of the price.

Is Shopping on Prime Day a Better Deal?

Sometimes. CR's shopping experts do see real savings on kitchen, tech, and beauty goods, and (especially) on Amazon Basics items. But, says CR's deals editor, Samantha Gordon, "Amazon often slaps a 'Prime Day Deal' sticker on a price that has been there for weeks. So the only way to tell if you're getting a bargain is to know what the typical price was before the Prime Day sale began–usually in mid-July."

The Better Deal
HOME GOODS

ROBOTIC VACUUMS

DYSON 360 VIS NAV VACUUM CLEANER $1,200

73 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

IROBOT ROOMBA COMBO I5 $350

72 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

The high-priced Dyson is one of the few robotic vacuums that excel in our lab tests for carpet cleaning, thanks to its extra-strong suction. For $850 less, consider the iRobot. Though it's not quite as effective on carpet, it cleans bare floors very well. It's also quiet and can double as a robotic mop, a function the Dyson doesn't offer.

ALL-PURPOSE CLEANERS

MR. CLEAN CLEAN FREAK
$5.94 for 16 fluid ounces

THE BETTER DEAL

SIMPLE GREEN
$3.92 for 24 fluid ounces

THE LOWDOWN

In our tests, Mr. Clean easily removed grease and dirt from most surfaces, and it features a power nozzle that lets you control the amount of spray dispersed. But for less than half the price per ounce, you can get Simple Green, a concentrated option that tackles almost every cleaning task equally well. You'll need to dilute this cleaner with water—a little goes a long way.

SPOT ILLUSTRATIONS: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS (WASHING MACHINES); CONSUMER REPORTS

Are Holiday Sales a Better Deal?

Yes. You can save on items such as mattresses and large appliances during these sales events. "Mattresses get discounted by roughly 5 to 10 percent on weekends like July 4th," says CR's Samantha Gordon. These sales tend to start a week or so ahead of the holiday, so Gordon advises patience: "An early sale might be an indication that an even bigger one is coming for the weekend," she says.

FRONT-LOAD WASHING MACHINES

LG WM8900HBA
$1,575
85 OVERALL SCORE

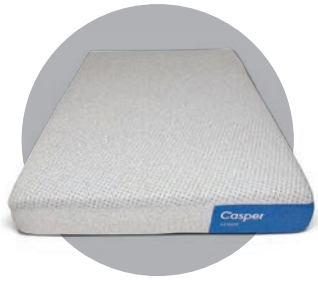
THE BETTER DEAL

LG WM3400CW
$950
86 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

The pricier WM8900HBA is a powerhouse—a sleek, efficient, large-capacity front-loader offering excellent washing performance and extras including WiFi connectivity and a steam cycle for removing stains and wrinkles. It's quiet and gentle on clothes. The LG WM3400CW has a smaller capacity, doesn't have a steam cycle, and is not quite as gentle. But it does offer top-notch cleaning performance and water and energy efficiency, and it's just as quiet, for around $600 less.

INNERSPRING MATTRESSES



CASPER DREAM
$1,875
83 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

DENVER MATTRESS DOCTOR'S CHOICE PLUSH
$800
82 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

These top-ranked mattresses are both on the softer side (3 out of 10 on our firmness scale). The Casper is supportive for back and side sleepers of all sizes and has a very good score for stabilization, a measure of the vibration transmitted across the mattress when there's movement on one side—an important consideration if you sleep with a partner. The Denver Mattress Doctor's Choice has a slightly lower stabilization score, but it's also supportive, and better than the Casper for back sleepers. And it's $1,000 less.

Mary Beth Quirk
Managing Editor, Shopping

MY GREAT BUY!

PILLOW

BECKHAM LUXURY LINENS HOTEL COLLECTION PILLOW
$60 for 2 pillows
72 OVERALL SCORE

I sleep hot, no matter the season, so a pillow that stays cooler is ideal for me. This two-pack fits the bill perfectly. In our tests, it got top marks for breathability, as well as for side and back support. Even better: You can often find this pair on sale for anywhere from 10 to 40 percent off.

The Better Deal
HEALTHY LIVING

COLOMBIAN COFFEES

STARBUCKS COLOMBIA GROUND MEDIUM ROAST
83¢ per ounce

THE BETTER DEAL

GREAT VALUE (WALMART) 100% COLOMBIAN GROUND MEDIUM DARK
44¢ per ounce

THE LOWDOWN

Either of these ground Colombian coffees will give you a medium-bodied brew. But even though they're both labeled "medium," they have slightly different flavors. Starbucks coffee is strong and bold, with the characteristics of dark-roasted coffees—chocolate, caramel, and some smokiness. Walmart's brand tastes lighter and smoother, and it's a little fruitier. Our expert tester thought both coffees made a good cup, but choose Walmart's if you'd prefer to pay half as much per serving.

OLIVE OILS

COBRAM ESTATE
$24 for 25.4 fluid ounces
4/5
OVERALL QUALITY

THE BETTER DEAL

GRAZA SIZZLE EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL
$15 for 25.3 fluid ounces
4/5
OVERALL QUALITY

THE LOWDOWN

These olive oils were among the best in our taste tests. The Cobram is from California and the Graza is from Spain, and they both have fresh, complex flavors that will enhance foods when they're drizzled on before serving or used in a dressing. The nuanced taste of extra-virgin olive oils tends to get lost when you use them in cooking, though. If you want to keep only one oil in your pantry, we suggest going with the Graza: It's tasty enough to punch up your dishes when you use it as a finishing touch but not so pricey that you'll hesitate before sautéing and frying with it.

Do Wholesale Clubs Offer a Better Deal?

Yes, you can save money at Costco, Sam's Club, and BJ's—as long as you shop often enough to make up the cost of the membership fee ($50 to $65 per year). You won't sacrifice quality, either. These stores carry many name brands, and CR's tests have found products from their in-house labels for food and household goods (like Costco's Kirkland Signature) to be both high-quality and lower-priced. You can find good deals on appliances and tech, too, says CR's Samantha Gordon.

SPOT ILLUSTRATIONS: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: MANUFACTURER (ETEKCITY). CONSUMER REPORTS

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

Trisha Calvo
Deputy Editor, Health & Food

MY GREAT BUY!

SUNSCREEN

EUCERIN ADVANCED HYDRATION LOTION SPF 30 $10

75 OVERALL SCORE

I first tried this sunscreen when I couldn't find my usual go-to brand, and I've stuck with it ever since. It rubs in quickly, it's gentle enough to use on my face, and I like the moisturizing, plumping effect it has on my skin. Plus, it's about half the price of the sunscreen I previously used.

ELLIPTICAL EXERCISERS

LIFE FITNESS E5 GO $5,500

78 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

SOLE E25 $1,100

77 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

You can get a great, low-impact workout on the Life Fitness or the Sole. Both offer programs that automatically adjust resistance and workout intensity based on your target heart rate. The Life Fitness has the advantage of offering an adjustable stride length, but the Sole still earned top marks in our ergonomics test—and it costs $4,400 less. Plus, you can use the free Sole+ app to access a large library of on-demand video workouts.

BATHROOM SCALES

ETEKCITY APEX EFS-A591S-KUS $80

91 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

ESCALI HIGH CAPACITY ANTI-SLIP HC225W $50

92 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

The Etekcity is an excellent WiFi-connected smart scale with many bells and whistles. But CR's past testing and other research suggest some of those features—body fat measurement, for example—might not be that accurate. For $30 less, the Escali weighs accurately, has a clearly readable display, and accommodates users up to 562 pounds, one of the highest limits available.

The Better Deal
TECH GEAR

Althea Chang-Cook
Writer, Home

MY GREAT BUY!

TABLET, 9-INCH SCREEN

SAMSUNG GALAXY TAB S6 LITE $299

75 OVERALL SCORE

I wanted a tablet I could use with a stylus for taking notes in meetings. This model–a couple of generations old but still widely available–was a fraction of the cost of some of the latest versions. After a year of using it for everything from work to watching movies, I was so happy with it that I bought a refurbished model at half price for my son.

SMARTWATCHES

✓ APPLE WATCH ULTRA 2 GPS + CELLULAR $800

91 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

$ APPLE WATCH SERIES 10 $400

90 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

Both Apple Watches impressed our testers, and they both deliver all the basic health monitoring features, such as sleep tracking, heart rate monitoring, and fall detection. But the Ultra 2 offers premium upgrades aimed squarely at outdoorsy types: longer battery life, a larger watch face, and the ability to make calls without your phone nearby. Unless you plan to take your watch off the grid—or you really prefer the Ultra's rugged titanium design—the Series 10 likely does everything you need at half the price.

INDOOR-OUTDOOR SECURITY CAMERAS

✓ EUFY SOLO CAM S230 $130

78 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

$ TP-LINK TAPO C310 2K $30

78 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

The Eufy and TP-Link indoor-outdoor cameras receive identical scores in our tests, offering terrific video quality, speedy alerts, and strong data security. So why the big price difference? The Eufy runs on rechargeable batteries and features a built-in solar panel to keep it charged. It also has a spotlight for color night vision. The TP-Link needs to be plugged in (requiring an outdoor outlet, if that's where you're using it) and offers only black-and-white night vision. But for $100 less, you might not mind those slight compromises.

SPOT ILLUSTRATIONS: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS (TABLET, TVS); MANUFACTURERS

WORSE — BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | $ CR SMART BUY

NOISE-CANCELING HEADPHONES

APPLE AIRPODS MAX $500

79 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

SOUNDCORE LIFE Q20 $50

73 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

Apple's large noise-canceling headphones have very good sound, and they're sleek enough to qualify as a fashion accessory. But they're also among the most expensive models in our ratings. The Soundcores don't have the same high-end style, but our testers report that their sound and noise-canceling performance rivals those pricey Apples—for one-tenth the price.

65-INCH TVs

SONY XR-65A95L $2,900

84 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

SAMSUNG QN65QN90D $1,400

80 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

Make no mistake: The Sony set—a flagship OLED model—is among the best TVs you can buy. But the Samsung delivers great performance for less than half the price. It, too, earns top marks for overall picture quality and can deliver a compelling high dynamic range (HDR) experience, with vivid images. It also has a wider-than-average viewing angle for an LCD-based set.

Can Price Trackers Find a Better Deal?

Maybe. But unless you're a super-savvy online shopper researching moment-to-moment sales, price trackers–tools that monitor fluctuations in cost–are probably not worth your time. They usually require you to install a browser extension, and aren't totally reliable, Gordon says. "You can see if something is really on sale, but the data changes constantly, and doesn't factor in discounts and coupon codes."

The Better Deal
CARS, SUVs & TRUCKS

MIDSIZED SEDANS

TOYOTA CROWN
$41,440-$54,990

81 OVERALL SCORE

TOYOTA CAMRY
$28,700-$36,425

82 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

These sedans have a lot in common: They're both hybrids, they both scored well in our road tests, and they're from the same brand. The Crown comes standard with all-wheel drive (which is optional on the Camry), and it's bigger, with an especially roomy trunk. But the Crown's interior is snugger than you might expect, especially in the back seat. In fact, while the Camry is smaller overall, its interior feels about as spacious as the Crown's. The Camry also offers better fuel economy—48 mpg overall vs. the Crown's 42 mpg. More important, it costs thousands less.

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs

ACURA RDX
$44,700-$54,450

75 OVERALL SCORE

KIA SPORTAGE HYBRID
$28,790-$44,390

74 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

The Acura RDX impressed us with its swift handling, powerful turbocharged engine, supportive front seats, and standard active safety features. But the Kia Sportage Hybrid's superior fuel economy—it gets 36 mpg overall vs. 22 mpg for the Acura—helps make it the smarter value (plus the Kia doesn't require you to use premium gasoline, compounding the fuel savings). It also offers better controls than the Acura and a roomier back seat, as well as a comfortable ride and competent handling, for a much lower price.

Are End-of-the-Month Buys a Better Deal?

They can be. Car dealerships and their sales staff are usually incentivized to achieve sales targets by the end of each month. This means they are rewarded for hitting certain sales numbers, and may be a bit more flexible with the price as their deadlines are approaching. According to Kelley Blue Book, this is especially true in December, when salespeople are trying to hit an annual goal, but smart car shoppers might get a good deal at the end of any month.

SPOT ILLUSTRATIONS: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS (KIA, TOYOTA, BMW, SUBARU); MANUFACTURERS

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

PICKUP TRUCKS

HONDA RIDGELINE $40,150-$46,750

79 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

FORD MAVERICK 2.0T $26,995-$40,750

74 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

The midsized Ridgeline has much to recommend it. The powertrain and ride are refined, especially for a pickup, and the truck bed has a clever storage system. But you can save by choosing the smaller Maverick. It rides smoothly, is easy to get into and out of, and has good fuel efficiency at 23 mpg overall. Plus it got many updates for 2025, such as a larger center screen.

SPORTS CARS

BMW 2 SERIES $39,600-$65,500

78 OVERALL SCORE

THE BETTER DEAL

SUBARU BRZ $31,210-$36,360

74 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

Performance enthusiasts looking for a rear-drive coupe may be drawn to the 2 Series. We get it. This BMW actually lives up to expectations, managing to be luxurious and engaging at the same time. But when measured by fun-per-dollar value, the BRZ (and its Toyota GR86 twin) stands out. It delivers raw driving thrills, with cornering agility and a rev-happy engine that's available with a manual transmission. It also costs thousands less than the BMW, and lifetime maintenance will probably be less expensive, too.

Jake Fisher
Senior Director, Auto Test Center

MY GREAT BUY!

71 OVERALL SCORE

SPORTS CAR

2025 HONDA CIVIC SI $31,400

I recently bought a Honda Civic Si to share with my two boys, who are now of driving age. It's the perfect car–at the perfect price–for a teen to experience the love of driving. The precise manual shifter and sharp steering make it a blast to drive, the controls are simple and intuitive, and it comes with plenty of standard safety gear.

BUGS, BATS, AND MICE ... OH MY!

Keep Pests O

Who doesn't love seeing beautiful creatures out in nature? The flick of a cardinal's crimson wings, the delicacy of a dragonfly. But a mouse skittering across your kitchen? That's a different story. Animals and insects inside your home aren't just a nuisance; they're potential trouble, spreading pathogens and harming property. When can you manage the situation on your own and when do you need professional help? And what can you do to fortify your home—and yard—against unwanted visitors in the first place? Read on for smart, safe, effective solutions.

BY JANET SIROTO • ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID DORAN

Wasps look for nooks under eaves or in shutters to build nests. Then they can fly through the cracks into your house.
Deer see your yard as a tasty buffet. Their favorite snacks include hostas and hydrangeas.

ut—for Good

Bird nests can block your chimney and are tricky to remove. **Squirrels** can get inside through broken screens or loose vents.

Mice are sneaky intruders, able to squeeze through tiny holes. They can even scurry up your house's exterior, which is how they end up in your attic, too.

Insects

Protecting your house from insects starts outside. Richard Cooper, PhD, an entomologist and owner of R Cooper Consulting, a pest management firm in Yardley, Pa., says that ground cover, shrubs, and mulch encourage pest activity. So make sure they're not touching your house's foundation. They can be an express lane for bugs.

Ants

There are more than 700 species of ants in the U.S. Of those, 25 often come indoors, says Jim Fredericks, PhD, an entomologist and senior vice president of public affairs at the National Pest Management Association. Ants usually make their way inside in warm weather or after a heavy rain, searching for food and shelter.

➞ **GET THEM OUT** If you see ants, don't reach for sprays like Raid. These usually contain chemicals called pyrethroids, which can sometimes lead to even more ant colonies. Instead, wipe them up with a paper towel dampened with soapy water. Then place bait stations where you've seen activity—on the kitchen floor or under the sink, for example. If you have pets or small children around, place the stations out of reach, like under the stove. Ants will take the bait back to the nest, where it will poison the whole colony. Products that contain both sweet and protein-based bait, like Terro Liquid Ant & Roach Baits, $11, are a good bet because they attract a range of ant types. If you're still plagued by ants, see "When to Call a Pro," on the facing page.

➞ **KEEP THEM OUT** Close up cracks with a sealant or caulk and plug leaky doors or windows with weather stripping. CR recommends Flex Caulk High Performance Hybrid Caulk, $20, a clear product that's instantly impermeable.

Keep the kitchen crumb-free and the floor mopped, because even a drop of a sweet drink can be a feast for ants. Wipe down sticky containers (like those for honey or syrup) before storing them, Fredericks says. If you bring potted plants indoors, always wipe off the leaves first, and/or use aphid-killing sticks. Ants love the sweet substance that aphids excrete.

Some natural sprays with peppermint or vinegar are claimed to repel ants. But Cooper says these products aren't required to undergo the same testing for effectiveness as those with standard chemicals, so it's hard to say if they work.

Keep plantings trimmed. Shrubs that touch your house's exterior give bugs a highway inside. Push mulch back from the foundation, too.

Bees, Wasps, and Hornets

Outside your house, these insects do more good than harm, pollinating fruits, vegetables, and flowers. But it's a problem when they nest on the exterior of a house, often under eaves and in walls. They can sting and occasionally do structural damage.

➞ **GET THEM OUT** Before you do anything, check insectidentification.org to find out which type of stinging insect you're dealing with. Some of them (yellow jackets, killer bees, wasps) are aggressive and best left to pros. If you think it's safe, use an insecticide spray (such as a wasp and hornet killer) on the nest at or after dusk, when hives are less active. These sprays can shoot a stream up to 20 feet into a nest, keeping you a safe distance away. But Roger Dickens, a wildlife expert and technical service manager for the national pest control company Terminix, says it's hard to

get a liquid spray into the back of a nest where it can reach the colony and kill off the population. The advantage to hiring a pro is that they can apply a powder form of insecticide, which the bugs will trail into the far recesses of the hive, and you won't risk getting stung. It typically takes 24 to 48 hours to see results from applying insecticide.

➔ **KEEP THEM OUT** Sealing your house is job No. 1. Make sure screens are intact and that windows and doors close tightly. In early spring, if you see a bee or wasp repeatedly buzzing around a specific area (say, near shutters), it's likely a queen scoping out a nesting spot, so caulk any cracks and crevices. By the summer the insects have already made their nests or hives, so at that point the only recourse may be professional help (see services at right).

Moths

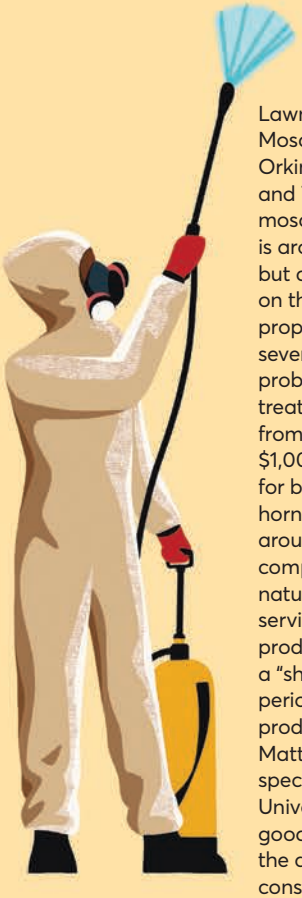
Adult pantry moths (aka Indian meal moths) and clothes moths live only a few weeks or months, but they can ruin kitchen staples and wreck sweaters, rugs, and more.

➔ **GET THEM OUT** With clothes moths, it's not the adults that feed on fibers but the larvae. And the larvae are practically impossible to see, so you probably won't know you have a problem until you notice mature moths fluttering around or find holes in your clothes. Dry-clean or wash potentially affected fabric items in hot water to kill the larvae and eggs, then store them in sealed bags. Freezing clothes in plastic bags for four days can also kill larvae and eggs. Large items like rugs will need a specialty dry cleaner.

Putting sticky moth traps in your closet will catch some adult bugs but might not eliminate the problem because larvae may already be hatching. Don't use mothballs; they're not effective, and their ingredients can irritate your

WHEN TO CALL A PRO

The right expert can make quick work of a pest problem. Here's what to know.



Exterminators

These pros can identify and eliminate insects and rodents by using chemicals. To find one, go to pestworld.org/find-local-exterminators; check your state's pest regulatory agency (often the state Department of Agriculture); or check the Better Business Bureau. Angi and HomeAdvisor can also offer leads. Angi says pest-control treatments run about $170. If you have pets, ask in advance about safety protocols.

Wildlife Control Professionals

These experts are trained to handle most small critters, including squirrels, bats, skunks, and snakes. Search the Find a Pest Pro section at pestworld.org; use a specialized directory, like the one at batworld.org; or find local licensed practitioners on Angi or HomeAdvisor. Companies such as Critter Control operate nationally. A wildlife-removal visit costs about $400, according to Angi. If an animal is endangering public safety, contact your municipality's animal control department or your state's wildlife agency.

Yard-Spraying Services

These companies might be listed as exterminators and can be found through similar directories. Call them for problems with ticks, fleas, and mosquitoes. Some offer termite treatments, too. You may see familiar names such as Lawn Doctor, Mosquito Squad, Orkin, Terminix, and TruGreen. One mosquito treatment is around $250, but cost depends on the size of the property and the severity of the problem. Termite treatment ranges from about $240 to $1,000. Nest removal for bees, wasps, or hornets is typically around $525. Some companies advertise natural spraying services, but their products may have a "shorter efficacy period than synthetic products," says Matt Frye, a rodent specialist at Cornell University. It's a good idea to ask the company you're considering how long it expects the treatment to last.

Fix-It People

They can fill cracks, add weather stripping, repair screens, and put up fencing or mesh to keep pests out of crawl spaces. Search on Angi, HomeAdvisor, and Taskrabbit, and read reviews to make sure the person you choose has the skills you need. Angi says you can expect to pay $50 to $150 per hour for this kind of service.

eyes and nose. Extended exposure can even lead to liver and kidney damage.

Pantry moths typically enter your house via already infested dry foods (say, a box of cereal or bag of dog food) and fan out from there, say experts at the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University in New York. So if you spot tiny wormlike larvae or full-fledged moths in your cupboards, act fast. Inspect grain- and flour-based products (spread them out on a cookie sheet for easier examination) and dispose of anything that's been affected. Then vacuum and wipe down cabinet surfaces.

➞ **KEEP THEM OUT** Clothes moths can piggyback on used items you bring home, like a tag-sale blanket. Wash the items in hot water or freeze them before storing them with your things. To minimize pantry moth problems, keep dry goods in sealed containers.

Flies

House flies can carry 100-plus pathogens, including malaria, salmonella, and tuberculosis. Some research shows that fruit flies can transfer pathogens among their food sources.

➞ **GET THEM OUT** If you see just a few house flies, place flytraps or flypaper around your house. In tests of five brands of flytraps, a Texas A&M study found that Starbar Quikstrike products, like its Fly Bait, $27 for two, worked best. But for an infestation, it's best to call in a pro to locate and treat the source (see page 39).

Fruit flies feed on overripe produce, so toss old fruit and veggies, then set a trap near the trouble spot that consists of half an inch of apple cider vinegar and a couple of drops of dish soap in a small bowl. Cover with plastic wrap secured with a rubber band, and pierce the wrap a few times with a fork. Drawn to the vinegar, fruit flies will slip through the holes and get stuck. You can also buy fruit-fly traps, about $13 for a four-pack.

➞ **KEEP THEM OUT** May we repeat: Seal your house well. And keep rodents out (see the facing page). A dead mouse in a wall could lead to a sudden flurry of "blow" flies (the kind with a blue-green sheen). To prevent fruit flies, rinse and dry produce as soon as you bring it home (even bananas and citrus). Though invisible to us, a cache of fruit fly eggs lurking on fruit can be 500 strong, so don't leave a bowl of fruit on the counter. Either refrigerate fruit (24 hours in the fridge can kill eggs) or keep it in a sealed container. If you don't compost or use a garbage disposal, store fruit rinds in a zipped plastic bag in the freezer until trash day to keep the kitchen bin free of fruit flies.

PESTS THAT CAUSE SERIOUS DAMAGE

Termites, carpenter ants, and carpenter bees can eat or burrow into wood components of a house—the foundation, beams, or joists—and cause structural problems, not to mention aesthetic ones. Termites alone cause $5 billion in property damage per year in the U.S.

Matt Frye at Cornell University suggests doing a walk-through of your house's interior at least annually to check for signs of these types of pests. Be especially alert in high-moisture zones like the basement. Signs of termites include pencil-sized mud tubes along a foundation wall or hanging under floor joists, as well as discarded wings near windows and doors. With carpenter bees, you'll see what's known as frass, a mix of chewed-up wood and insect pieces, says Roger Dickens of Terminix. Carpenter ants are primarily nocturnal. Flick on a light at night and you might see them scurry.

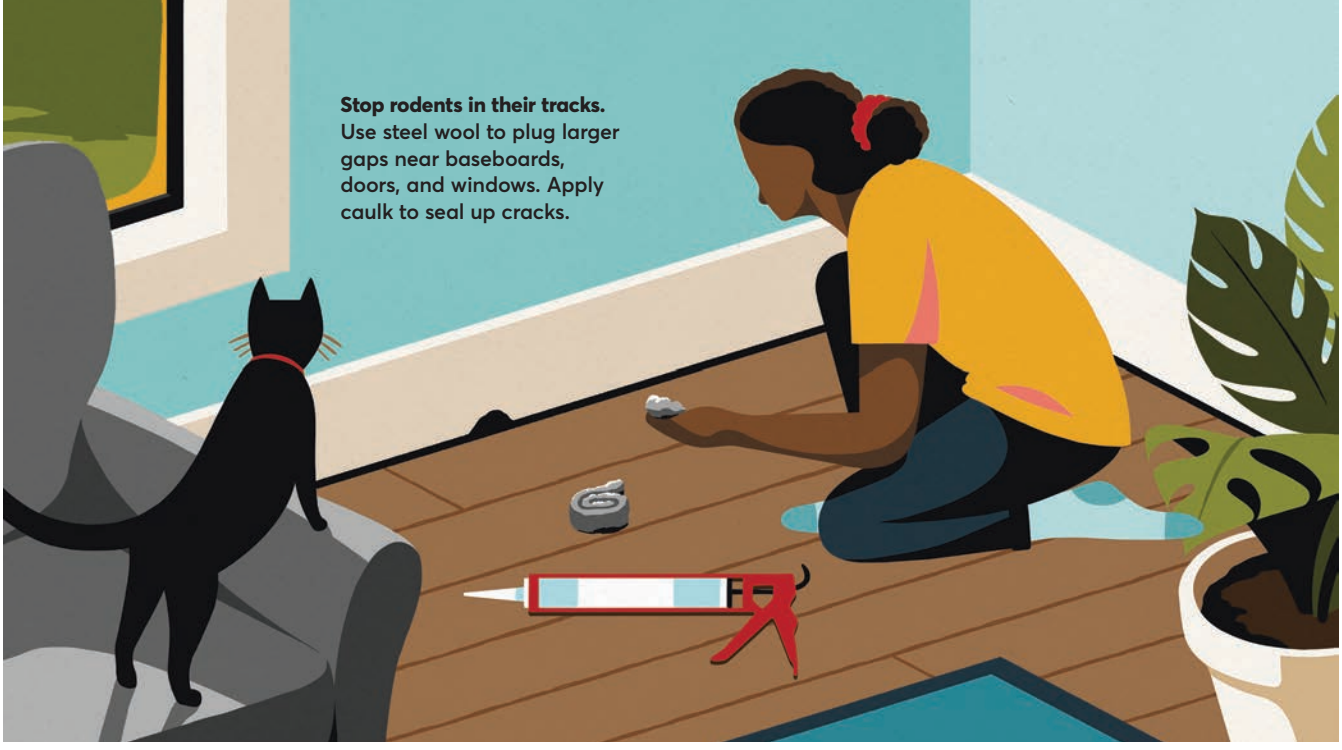
If you find evidence of these pests, don't buy a DIY treatment. Instead, call a pro who's licensed by the National Pest Management Association (see page 39).

Roaches

For some 140 million years, roaches have roamed the planet. "They move around dirty surfaces and can contaminate food and trigger allergies," says Changlu Wang, PhD, an extension specialist in the department of entomology at Rutgers University.

➞ **GET THEM OUT** Roaches love kitchens (for the food) and bathrooms (for the dampness). If you see just a few, suck them up with a bagged vacuum and throw out the bag with the trash right away, Wang says. (The same advice applies to stink bugs, ladybugs, and crickets, which head indoors in cool weather—although you could scoop them up and take them outside; all are considered beneficial.) If you've seen one roach, there may be more. Wang recommends placing gel bait under the stove, refrigerator, and sinks.

➞ **KEEP THEM OUT** Gel baits—and maintaining a clean, well-sealed house—are your best defense. For an ongoing problem, call an exterminator (see page 39).



Stop rodents in their tracks. Use steel wool to plug larger gaps near baseboards, doors, and windows. Apply caulk to seal up cracks.

Rodents and Other Small Critters

Summer is a great time to close gaps and cracks before rodents seek shelter indoors in the fall, says Matt Frye, a rodent and structural pest management specialist at the New York State Integrated Pest Management Program at Cornell University. It's estimated that they infiltrate about 21 million U.S. homes every winter.

Mice and Rats

These critters can squeeze through tight spaces, climb to reach holes in a roof, and chomp through drywall, insulation, and wires, potentially sparking fires. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, they also contaminate food and can carry salmonella and hantavirus, which can be fatal to humans.

➔ **GET THEM OUT** A classic snap trap is fast and reusable. Newer no-see/no-touch traps, which have a snap mechanism inside a closed box, can spare you some unpleasantness, but they aren't reusable. Bait stations are another choice. Rodents die a couple of days after eating the bait–but this could happen inside your walls, leaving you with another (smelly) problem. If you'd rather not kill mice, you can use a "catch and release" trap baited with peanut butter (which rodents prefer to cheese), then free them far from home. There's another option many people swear by: Get a cat.

➔ **KEEP THEM OUT** Mice can get through even a dime-sized hole, so seal cracks and fill larger gaps with steel wool, which mice tend not to chew because of its sharp edges. Keep food, including pet food, in airtight containers, and sweep regularly. You can also hire an exterminator to find and close up entry points and/or use rodenticides only available to pros. You might see sonic devices that manufacturers claim emit sound waves (inaudible to us) that deter critters. While they may be helpful, more research is needed.

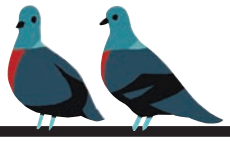
Squirrels and Possums

They may not get inside as frequently as mice, but these creatures can wreak havoc when they do. Squirrels can chew through electrical wires and carry rabies, fleas, and ticks. Possums cause damage by scratching and gnawing, and can carry toxoplasmosis and tuberculosis, which can be transmitted through bites.

➔ **GET THEM OUT** It's best to close off the area where they are until you can get help from a wildlife pro (see page 39), especially if the animals are in a hard-to-reach spot. According to Angi, removal services can range from $250 to $500. If there's just one critter in an area with an exterior door, you could try to shoo it out with a broom. But don't get too close–it might bite.

➔ **KEEP THEM OUT** Squirrels can get onto a roof from nearby trees, so cut branches 6 to 8 feet back from your home. Place hardware cloth (a heavy-gauge mesh) of half an inch or larger over vents, cap the chimney with an animal guard, and seal cracks around windows and doors. For louvered attic openings, use window screening inside, then cover that with hardware cloth.

Bats, Birds, and Snakes



These animals often pop up in horror movies, which means no one wants to encounter them inside. While there are a few ways to protect your house and potentially shoo away these pests, in many cases you'll need to call a professional.

Bats

Bats are a misunderstood species, playing a vital role in pest control, plant pollination, and seed dispersal. Still, they can carry pathogens (it's rare, but humans can contract rabies from a bite) and leave heaps of harmful poop, or guano.

➞ **GET THEM OUT:** If there's a lone bat lost in your house, turn off interior lights, open the windows, and turn on an exterior light to encourage it to exit. (Bats eat bugs, which are drawn to light.) But if you have several bats living in, say, your attic, call a licensed wildlife professional. They're protected in certain regions, so they need special handling.

➞ **KEEP THEM OUT** Install screens over vents, cover chimneys with animal guards, fill obvious holes with steel wool, and caulk cracks. Bats can slip into spaces as small as ⅜ inch wide. But wait until the weather cools: April through August is breeding season, and sealing off areas could trap babies.

Birds

Gutters, soffits, and eaves offer convenient nesting sites, but birds settling into these spots can clog drainage and ventilation paths, as well as leave acidic droppings.

➞ **GET THEM OUT** You'll probably have to wait until late summer. Most active nests are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Once you confirm that a nest is inactive, cover yourself up in long pants and a long-sleeved shirt, and put on rubber gloves and a mask because bird droppings can transmit diseases such as histoplasmosis (a fungal lung infection). Dispose of the nest in a zip-top bag; double bag it for safety. Scrub away bird droppings with a solution of 1 part bleach to 10 parts water. If you need help—or if you discover a nest during breeding season in a hard-to-reach place like a chimney—call a pro (see page 39).

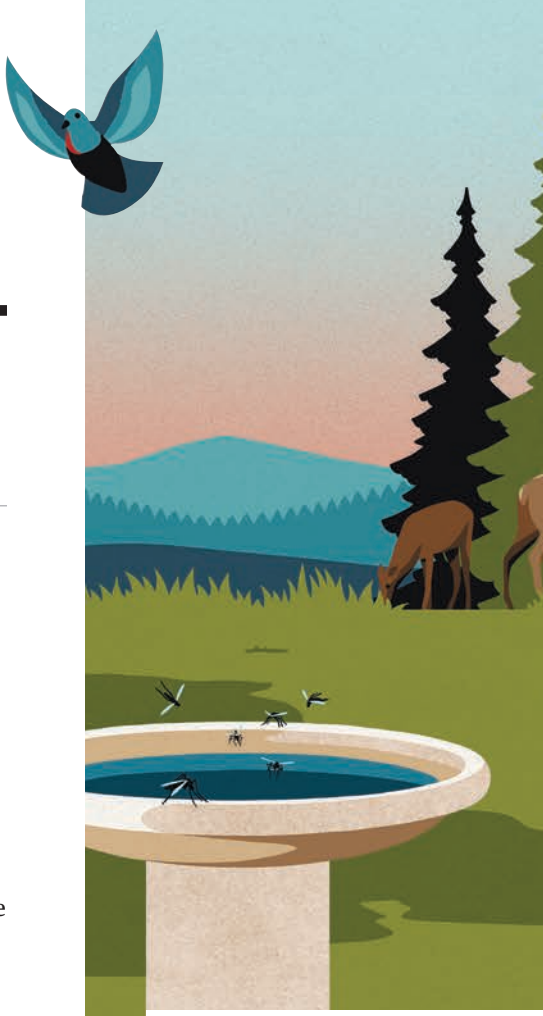
➞ **KEEP THEM OUT** Protect enticing outdoor spots. Use a metal guard on the dryer vent and place mesh covering over gutters. If birds are drawn to the corners of window sills, deter them by installing metal bird spikes, which usually attach to the sill with screws or construction adhesive.

Snakes

Snakes can get washed inside by flood waters or slither into dark cellars for shelter or food, then stay to hibernate.

➞ **GET THEM OUT** If you're absolutely sure a snake is harmless (go to cdc.gov/niosh and search for "snakes"), you could put on gloves, grab it, and toss it into the yard, or buy a snake trap. But it's generally safer to call a pro.

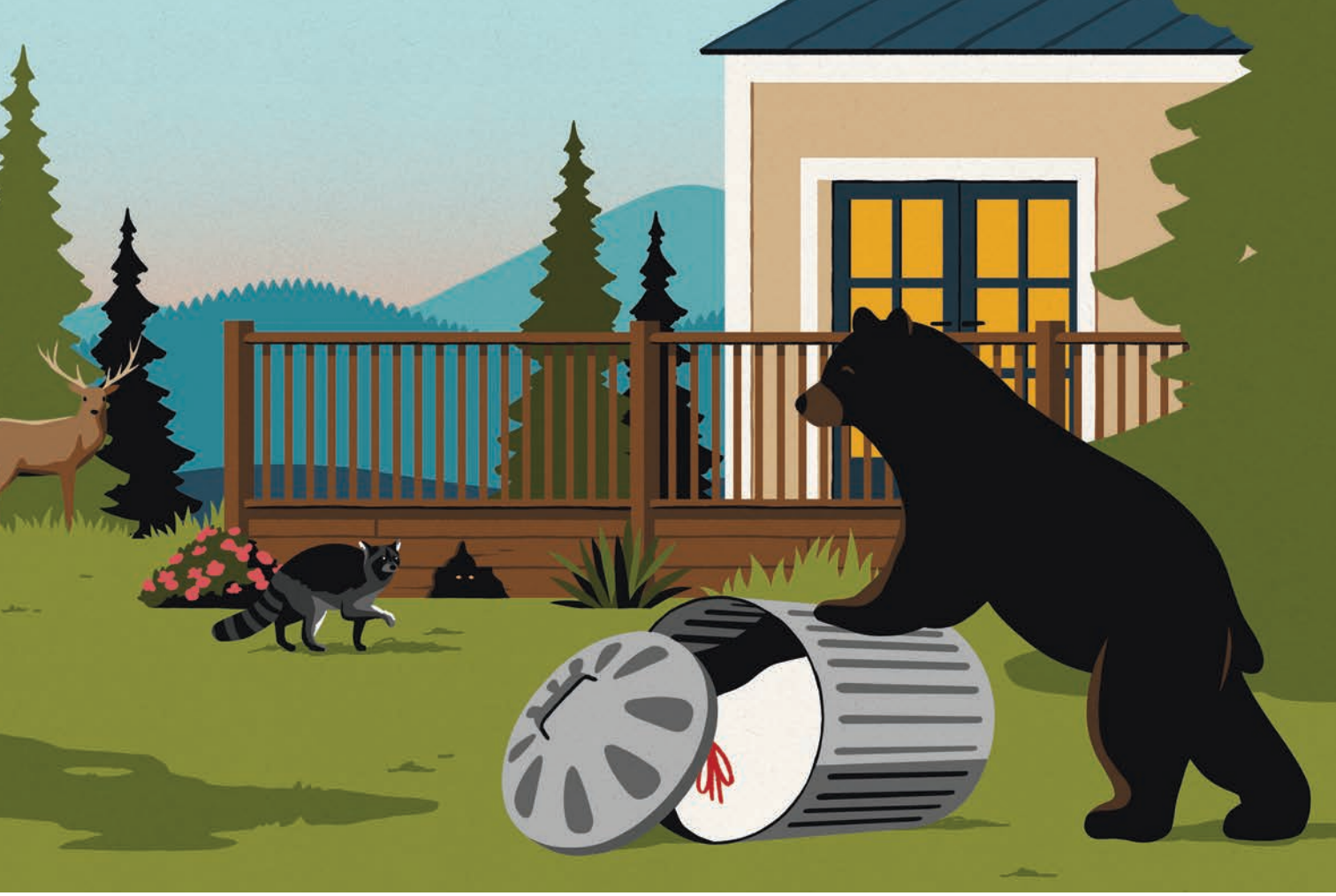
➞ **KEEP THEM OUT** Seal holes exceeding ¼ inch in diameter in a basement or crawl space, and replace missing door sweeps and vent covers. Minimize scrap heaps and woodpiles near your house. You can also buy snake repellents, but read the warning labels carefully.



LOOK WHO'S IN MY YARD

Bears, raccoons, ticks, and more: Protect your property from outdoor pests, too.

WORSE BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED



MOSQUITOES AND TICKS

The deadliest creature in the world isn't a shark, snake, or spider, says Jim Fredericks of the National Pest Management Association. It's the mosquito, which can spread diseases including malaria, yellow fever, dengue, encephalitis, West Nile virus, and Zika virus. Mosquitoes are attracted to standing water and need only half an inch of it to lay eggs, Fredericks says, so eliminate pools in flower saucers and clogged gutters. Plant basil, catnip, marigold, mint, lavender, or lemon balm; their scent may help repel mosquitoes.

To protect yourself against bites, cover up, and use a repellent containing deet, like our product picks below.

Ticks, which can carry Lyme disease, tend to live in dense landscaping, tall grass, and wooded areas. Mow often and thin out dense plantings. Patio furniture, play sets, and a dog's invisible fence all need a 6-foot buffer of manicured, unused lawn from woods or meadows that abut your property, says Richard Cooper, an entomologist. Ticks can travel inside on pets (even those treated with protective meds), so inspect them after they've been outside. Having a pro spray your perimeter and in wooded areas can help. Wear long sleeves, and tuck pants into socks for longer outdoor stints. Our top-rated insect repellents also guard against ticks.

RACCOONS AND SKUNKS

These creatures look for a cozy spot to make a den. They can damage property, carry disease, and, in the case of skunks, spray a noxious odor. To ward them off, keep your yard free of debris, and block spaces under porches and decks. You might need to hire a pro to cover open areas with hardware cloth or wire mesh, which should extend 2 inches down into the soil (these animals can dig). Make your property less appealing by placing open jars of vinegar or ammonia-soaked rags (natural deterrents) near areas you want to protect. Wear a mask and gloves when handling these materials. If you have pets, don't use ammonia; it can be toxic. Opt for vinegar instead.

DEER, BEARS, AND COYOTES

Deer can transport ticks and eat up your garden; coyotes and bears can tear into trash and threaten pets. To avoid attracting them, thoroughly clean your grill and even clear away fruit that has fallen off trees. Find certified bear-proof trash containers at bearwise.org; these can also stop coyotes. If you see a bear or coyote loitering, stay inside, turn on outdoor lights, and make loud noises to scare them off. Deer like to eat hostas, coleus, hydrangeas, and vegetables, but they avoid strongly scented and flavored plants like herbs, geraniums, and alliums, so try planting these nearby. A deer fence (which should be at least 76 inches high), can cost $17 to $90 per linear foot.

CR'S TOP-RATED INSECT REPELLENTS

Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wipes $7

96 OVERALL SCORE

Off Sportsmen Deep Woods Insect Repellent 3 $13

93 OVERALL SCORE

How to Hear Everything

Is the TV always too low? Do your friends often seem to mumble? Good news: There are more helpful tools than ever to keep the sounds around you clear and audible.

BY CATHERINE ROBERTS

OFTEN, IT CAN TAKE CLOSE TO A DECADE for people with hearing loss to decide to get help. The cost of hearing aids—which can top $7,000 a pair—has long been one of the chief reasons for the delay.

Another barrier: The ever-increasing number and variety of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aid options available make for a confusing marketplace. Amazon's "OTC hearing aids" results page, the first stop for many looking for help, shows aids costing more than $2,000 listed near others that you can buy for $50. The descriptions don't always make it easy to tell the difference between the products, either.

If the issues above have you hesitating, be aware that addressing hearing problems sooner rather than later can reduce the risk of related issues like isolation and depression. Timely action is also vital for keeping your remaining hearing skills sharp, says Michele DiStefano, AuD, an audiologist at the nonprofit Center for Hearing and Communication in New York City. "The longer you deprive the ear of stimulation, the more chance you have of losing that clarity of words," she says.

Fortunately, insurance coverage for hearing aids is more common than it used to be. Plus, certain settings on your TV, apps on your phone, and tools such as remote microphones can help in many environments. Here's how to find the hearing aids and other devices that can set you on the road to better hearing.

How Much Help Do You Need?

Sometimes, it's surprisingly hard for people to recognize hearing loss in themselves. The early signs—trouble having conversations on the phone or in groups, for instance—can be subtle. "Quite often, you don't know what you're missing," DiStefano says.

A couple of clues: You may notice that you're having more difficulty understanding people in noisy places or you're frequently asking people to repeat themselves. You may also often need to turn up the volume on the TV or radio to the point that others complain it's too loud.

If you experience any of the above, free online tools can give you some helpful information, says Larry Humes, PhD, distinguished professor emeritus of speech, language, and hearing sciences at Indiana University Bloomington. He recommends starting with some form of the Hearing Handicap Inventory questionnaire (versions exist for people of different ages; find a shortened screening version at **CR.org/HLscreen).** It can help you figure out whether you have a hearing problem and how severe it might be. A good next step is taking the online Consumer Ear Disease Risk Assessment (or CEDRA). That research-backed online tool (find it at sites.northwestern.edu/cedra) will help identify whether your hearing loss is related to a medical condition that should be handled by a doctor—not with hearing aids.

Of course, you can also have your hearing evaluated by a professional. An otolaryngologist (also called an ENT, a physician specializing in treating the ears, nose, and throat) or an audiologist (a healthcare professional licensed to evaluate hearing problems and prescribe hearing aids) can perform hearing tests—which are usually covered by insurance. Those experts can diagnose the extent of any hearing loss and check for treatable medical conditions, such as impacted earwax or an infection, that could be interfering with your ability to hear.

If your hearing issues are not caused by a treatable medical condition, consider hearing aids. Until several years ago, most were available only by prescription. To make it easier for people to access hearing aids—fewer than a fifth of the 29 million Americans who could benefit have them—Congress in 2017 passed a law that created an OTC category. The result: Consumers have been able to purchase some hearing aids without a prescription since the fall of 2022.

How do the two types differ? In short, prescription hearing aids are appropriate for a wide range of hearing loss, from mild to profound, and can be purchased only from an audiologist or

PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES

ILLUSTRATIONS BY T.M. DETWILER

a licensed hearing aid dispenser. OTC hearing aids, on the other hand, are intended for people with self-perceived mild to moderate hearing problems and are sold at retailers such as Best Buy and drugstore chains like Walgreens.

Most people with hearing impairment have loss that falls in that mild to moderate range. Still, even if OTC hearing aids are appropriate for your level of loss, it's wise to consider whether you'll be comfortable choosing and maintaining them without professional assistance. "If you like to have somebody guiding you and being a resource, then I'd encourage you to stick with an audiologist or dispenser," says Jasleen Singh, AuD, an assistant professor of speech, language, and hearing sciences at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

What to Look For in OTC Aids

As you shop, it's important to take your time to determine which model is best for you. If you end up with OTC aids that don't serve your needs, it may deter you from trying other, more effective ones later, says Nicholas Reed, AuD, faculty in the NYU Langone Health Optimal Aging Institute in New York City. Good places to start are CR's ratings of hearing aid brands (see page 51) and "How 3 Hearing Aids Stack Up," at right. Some experts we reached out to also recommend checking hearingtracker.com or hearadvisor.com, which test both OTC and prescription hearing aids. Read on for three important considerations.

PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS (3)

How 3 Hearing Aids Stack Up

In our lab tests of several over-the-counter hearing aids, we assessed loudness (maximum output volume), distortion (noisy static), and frequency (the range of pitches an aid can amplify). The models below all offered sufficient volume, little distortion, and a wide range of frequency, and fit within Food and Drug Administration parameters for these factors. We also checked for helpful features such as automatic noise reduction and directional microphones.

SELF-FITTING

Lexie Lumen $500 per pair

Receiver: Behind-the-ear
Noise reduction and directional microphone: Yes
Battery type: Replaceable
Call or audio streaming: No

CR'S TAKE To set these up, you simply take a short online hearing test. In addition to using settings that the test results determine are best for you, you can toggle among settings like "noisy indoor" and "outdoor." You control volume with the connected app or buttons on the aids. Bonus: The Lumens have a telecoil, which lets you loop into assistive listening systems at public venues like theaters. (See "Consider These Helpful Features," on page 50.)

Sony CRE-E10 $800 per pair

Receiver: In-the-canal
Noise reduction and directional microphone: Yes
Battery type: Rechargeable
Call or audio streaming: Music (and other audio) and calls

CR'S TAKE On these earbud-like devices, the ear domes seem flimsy and volume can be controlled only via the connected app, a problem if the user's phone is far away or out of charge. They're also a couple of hundred dollars more expensive than Sony's cheapest self-fitting OTC hearing aid model (the CRE-C10), but they do have useful features like rechargeable batteries and the ability to stream calls and music.

PRESET

Lucid Enlite $300 per pair

Receiver: In-the-ear
Noise reduction: Yes **Directional microphone:** No
Battery type: Replaceable
Call or audio streaming: No

CR'S TAKE These offer just two volume choices: high and low. Both settings amplify soft, higher-pitched sounds; the high setting also gives a mild boost to louder sounds. Each aid has its own volume control—but the switches are tiny and may be difficult to manipulate. To turn the aids off, you need to open up the battery door. And the carrying case has no protective padding; the devices and the batteries rattle around inside. One nice feature: You can use these aids interchangeably in either ear.

SELF-FITTING OR PRESET?

Over-the-counter hearing aids come in two categories: self-fitting and preset. Self-fitting OTC aids are designed to be used with a smartphone app that has a feature—often a brief hearing test—that customizes the device's settings specifically for your hearing loss.

Preset OTC aids typically have just a handful of basic settings for different levels of hearing loss (in the mild to moderate range) or for common issues such as trouble hearing in noisy rooms. Functionality varies widely, however: A few higher-end presets do allow for more customization, while some of the least expensive models offer users little more in the way of features than volume control.

Both types of OTC hearing aids tend to be less expensive than prescription devices. Some preset hearing aids, for instance, are available for around $100 a pair, while self-fitting OTC aids start at around $500 a pair.

However, a few in each category are close to $2,000 or more. Eargo's self-fitting aids, which are so tiny as to be nearly invisible when you're wearing them, top out at $2,500 a pair, for example. (By comparison, Costco Hearing Aid Centers offer prescription hearing aid models starting at $1,500.)

How to decide between the two categories of OTC hearing aids? Several of the experts we spoke with generally recommend self-fitting hearing aids over preset aids because self-fitting models must be cleared by the Food and Drug Administration for safety, usability, and effectiveness before being sold. Because preset OTC aids aren't required to have that FDA clearance, there's significantly more variability in their quality, says Vinaya Manchaiah, PhD, director of audiology at the University of Colorado Hospital in Aurora. Some, for instance, particularly the low-priced models, may have poor acoustics.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Self-fitting and preset OTC hearing aids are designed so that you can set them up on your own. Even so, you may want some support as you're learning how to use them or with troubleshooting any problems that arise. To check on the level of customer service that various OTC brands provide, visit their websites to see whether they give users assistance in setting up and using their OTC hearing aids. Companies such as Jabra and Lexie offer support from hearing professionals but may charge more for higher levels of service. Audiologists in your area might also be willing to assist with OTC hearing aids for a fee, so if you're interested in that service, call a few.

RETURN POLICY

The return period should allow you a minimum of a few weeks to thoroughly try out and get used to the hearing aids and to send them back if you're not satisfied. Most states require at least a 30-day trial period for prescription hearing aids; look for a return period that long or longer for OTC models.

These Earbuds Could Be Your Answer

With Apple's AirPods Pro 2 earbuds, you can listen to music, audiobooks, and podcasts, of course. But you can also get an overall boost to your hearing, without buying a dedicated pair of hearing aids.

That's because Apple's Hearing Aid feature software, which was approved by the Food and Drug Administration last September, makes it possible for people with mild to moderate hearing loss to use these earbuds as self-fitting OTC hearing aids.

To set them up as hearing aids, you take a quick audio test that plays a series of tones through the AirPods. Afterward, you'll be able to choose the amplification that suits you in a number of specific situations, such as listening to a conversation or the TV, and turn down any intrusive background noise.

The AirPods cost about $170, far less than most self-fitting OTC models. But some people may find that they're not as comfortable for all-day wear as conventional hearing aids. Apple's claimed battery life of up to 6 hours is also very short; many hearing aids stay charged for a full day of use.

So it might be best to view the AirPods Pro 2 as great noise-canceling earbuds that double as OTC hearing aids if you need occasional help hearing conversations, music, or the TV.

—Allen St. John

Apple AirPods Pro 2 $170

72 OVERALL SCORE

PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS (2); ANDERSEN ROSS/GETTY IMAGES (LIVING ROOM)

Easy Ways to Hear Your TV Better

If you have trouble understanding the dialogue when you watch shows and movies at home, these four tips can really help to improve the experience.

Select the best sound settings

Most TVs these days have sound modes (sometimes called "clear voice," "speech boost," or "dialogue boost") that amplify the frequencies of voices and reduce other sounds to make dialogue easier to hear. For sets without this, you can still get better sound. First, go into the audio settings. Then reduce the bass and lower midrange frequencies and boost the upper midrange and higher frequencies, which is where voices are typically found. You may have to fiddle a bit to see what sounds best to you.

Set up a soundbar

Almost any good soundbar (prices start at $100) can help you hear your TV better, especially when it comes to dialogue. In fact, many soundbars have the same voice clarity features as TVs. For optimal performance, look for a model that has a dedicated center channel (a speaker) that is specifically for dialogue.

Use closed captions

This works especially well for movies and prerecorded shows with rapid-fire dialogue. It's less effective with live programs such as sporting events and awards shows, where transcribing takes place in real time and often can't accurately keep up with what is being said.

Stream the sound

Headphones and earbuds help separate TV sound from ambient room noises. Even better, some televisions have two-way Bluetooth, enabling their sound to be transmitted straight to your wireless headphones or earbuds. If your set lacks that feature, a separate Bluetooth audio transmitter ($30 and up) will send the TV's sound to wireless headphones, earbuds, or Bluetooth-enabled hearing aids. Another option: a transmitter and headphone bundle—sometimes called a TV listener; prices start at about $100.

—James K. Willcox

Sonos Ray Soundbar $200

This is the manufacturer's most compact and least expensive soundbar, but it still delivers very good overall sound. You can also connect it wirelessly to other Sonos speakers to create a multiroom audio system in your home.

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

If You're Buying Prescription Aids

Prescription hearing aids can treat all levels of hearing loss, but they're the only option for those with severe or profound loss–which OTCs aren't equipped to address.

With prescription aids, you'll receive more than just the devices alone. You should also get the support of a hearing professional, including an in-person hearing test, guidance in selecting a model, and multiple fittings and adjustments.

Costs range from about $1,500 to more than $7,000 a pair. In our most recent survey, CR members who bought prescription aids reported paying a median price of $2,592 per pair after insurance.

Good to know: While insurance coverage for hearing aids is still spotty, it has become more common. So before you buy, check with your insurance provider to see what, if anything, it offers. Audiologist Michele DiStefano says she's had patients who didn't realize they had some coverage through their private insurance plans.

Where to shop so that you get the proper help and fairest prices? In CR's survey-based ratings of hearing aid retailers, the Department of Veterans Affairs received the highest Overall Score. If you are a veteran, hearing aids are fully covered when you get them through the VA.

CR members also reported high levels of satisfaction with wholesale clubs, in part because they offer a variety of pricing options and are transparent about cost. Costco was the second-best-scoring retailer overall in our ratings; Sam's Club scored highly as well. Hearing aid chains Audibel and Connect Hearing scored well, too. Hospitals, clinics, and ENTs were among the other high-scoring retailers, so consider seeking out hearing aids at a medical facility or an ENT's office nearby.

Consider These Helpful Features

Certain environments can be especially challenging, even with hearing aids. Here's how to hear better in a variety of social situations.

For movies, lectures, concerts, and other performances

A hearing aid component called a telecoil lets you use assistive listening systems in public spaces like courtrooms and theaters. With this, you can feed the venue's audio into your hearing aid. Most OTC aids (except Lexie's Lumen) lack a telecoil, and it's not standard in prescription aids. Many people buying aids aren't aware it's an option, so ask your audiologist about it, says Wynne Whyman of the Center for Hearing Access in Eugene, Ore.

For conversations in noisy restaurants and at social gatherings

A speech-in-noise feature amplifies the voice of the person in front of you above other sounds, while a noise-canceling feature helps neutralize background sounds. A remote microphone (available at hearing aid retailers and online, $200 and up) lets your conversation partner talk directly into the mic. Apple's Live Listen feature works with some hearing aids to turn certain iPhones into an extra mic. (Find the list of phones at support.apple.com/en-us/106341.)

For talking on the phone

Streaming capability sends calls directly to your hearing aid via Bluetooth and is available with many products, including prescription and some OTC models. When you're at home, speakerphone mode can also help. After all, audiologist Jasleen Singh says, "We hear better with two ears than one." Built-in captioning—such as Live Caption on certain Google Pixel and Android devices, and Live Captions on iPhone—can also be helpful by letting you read what is being said.

Ratings › **Hear Here** Check out our survey-based hearing aid brand ratings below. All Access CR members can find ratings of retailers that sell the devices at **CR.org/HAretailers.**

Brand	Reader Survey Results															Conversations				Battery		
	Overall Satisfaction Score	Reliability	Fit/comfort	Value	Sound richness	Sound clarity	Listening to the TV or radio	Talking on a phone	Talking in a car	In a movie theater, play, or concert	Ease of cleaning	Durability	Visibility to others	Ease of use	One-on-one in noisy places	One-on-one in quiet places	Group in loud places	Group in quiet places	Life	Ease of changing	Ease of charging
PRESCRIPTION HEARING AIDS																						
Philips	71																					
Jabra/Jabra Enhance	71																					
Rexton	68																					
Phonak	68																					
Oticon	66																					
Widex	58																					
Bernafon	57																					–
ReSound	57																					
Unitron	55																					
Signia	55																					
Lucid	54																					–
Starkey	54																					
TruHearing	53																					
Audibel	53																					
Miracle-Ear	52																					
Siemens	50																					
Beltone	49																					
OVER-THE-COUNTER HEARING AIDS																						
Jabra/Jabra Enhance	59																				–	
Eargo	56																				–	
MDHearing	37																				–	

HOW WE SURVEY: Ratings are based on Consumer Reports' 2023 Summer Survey of 13,163 CR members with prescription or over-the-counter devices. **Overall Satisfaction Score** is derived from members' ratings of clarity and richness of sound, reliability, value, fit/comfort, and our CR Consumer Experience Score. Attributes under Reader Survey Results reflect average scores on a scale from "completely dissatisfied" to "completely satisfied." A gray dash (–) indicates that sample size was insufficient to provide a rating or that an attribute is not applicable to a brand.

WORSE — BETTER

GO ON, Salt It!

You don't have to give up your favorite seasoning for a healthy diet. Find out how to make a good choice—flakes or crystals? Himalayan or kosher?—and get the most from every bit.

BY SHARON LIAO

Shopping for Salt

Salt used to be the most ordinary kitchen staple, but it has gone gourmet. With the tempting array in grocery and specialty stores, it can be hard to know what to reach for. Then there's the question of whether you should. Isn't salt bad for you? Wouldn't it be best to lower your sodium intake?

The answers start with understanding the difference between sodium and salt. Sodium is a mineral that your body needs to function. It makes up about 40 percent of salt by weight. (The rest is mostly chloride.) Yet getting too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure and raise your risk for kidney disease and osteoporosis.

Americans consume an average of 3,400 mg of sodium a day. The maximum recommended amount is 2,300 mg—about what's in a teaspoon of table salt. The real issue, though, isn't what you use in cooking or sprinkle on food. It's the vast amount of salt and other sodium sources in packaged and restaurant foods. Cutting down on those will have the biggest impact on reducing sodium in your diet, says Penny Kris-Etherton, PhD, past chair of the American Heart Association's Council on Lifestyle and Cardiometabolic Health. One delicious way to do that: Cook at home with fresh foods more often … even if you include salt.

In moderation, salt can be healthy. It brings out flavors and makes nutritious foods more appealing. Just like spices, each kind can have its own intriguing taste. Read on for everything you need to know about the different types of salt, and see our advice for using them on page 56.

PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES (SALT)

EVERYDAY CHOICES

Table

3¢ to 12¢ per ounce

▶ **WHAT IT IS** This salt-shaker standby is mined, then milled into fine granules. Some kinds have anti-clumping agents like silica.

▶ **HOW IT TASTES** Table salt usually contains added iodine to prevent thyroid deficiency. This mineral can give food a faint metallic flavor. You probably don't notice because you're used to it, says Stephen Chavez, a senior chef instructor at the Institute of Culinary Education in Pasadena, Calif. "But a quick taste test with kosher or sea salt will reveal the difference."

Kosher

10¢ to 25¢ per ounce

▶ **WHAT IT IS** The large, coarse crystals of this mined salt coat meat and poultry well when tenderizing, and it's easier to pinch into soups and sauces than finer salts. The name comes from its use in removing blood in meat and poultry during the koshering process.

▶ **HOW IT TASTES** Its clean, versatile flavor makes it popular in recipes. If you swap it in for table salt in recipes, you'll need to use more because the bigger crystals mean less sodium per spoonful.

Sea Salt

12¢ to $1 per ounce

▶ **WHAT IT IS** When salt makers let seawater evaporate in shallow pools, sea salt is what's left behind. Some companies label theirs "organic" or "natural," but no sea salt is a healthier alternative to table salt because all kinds have a similar chemical makeup.

▶ **HOW IT TASTES** Sea salt gets its mild briny flavor from trace minerals, such as magnesium. The coarse variety is used for pickled vegetables and brines, and the finer kind can substitute for table salt.

GOOD TO KNOW

Minerals like magnesium and potassium contribute flavor and color to salt, but the amounts aren't high enough to benefit your health.

SPECIALTY OPTIONS

Celtic

90¢ to $3.24 per ounce

▶ **WHAT IT IS** Clay-lined ponds in France fed by the Celtic Sea give this salt, also known as gray salt or sel gris, its color. Because the crystals tend to retain more moisture than other kinds of sea salt, they're slightly sticky.

▶ **HOW IT TASTES** Celtic salt is boldly briny. The granules cling well to moist foods, making them ideal toppings for braised meats, oilier fish such as salmon or trout, and mashed potatoes.

Maldon

94¢ to $2.20 per ounce

▶ **WHAT IT IS** These large, glistening flakes are harvested in the British coastal town of Maldon. Fleur de sel, from France, is similar but more delicate, and can cost about triple the price.

▶ **HOW IT TASTES** Maldon has a fresh, mild flavor and bold crunchiness that complements grilled meats, roasted vegetables, and treats like brownies. Fleur de sel has a tinge of sweetness and melts on your tongue; it's a luxe touch on soft foods such as cheeses and chocolate mousse.

Pink Himalayan

50¢ to $1.72 per ounce

▶ **WHAT IT IS** This trendy salt is extracted from mines in Pakistan near the Himalayan mountains. Iron oxide gives it a rosy-red tint.

▶ **HOW IT TASTES** Himalayan salt's subtle earthy notes make it a natural fit for most foods, and the color looks pretty on white fish like cod and halibut, avocado toast, and cheesecake. People also cook and serve food on slabs of Himalayan salt to season them.

Black

$1.20 to $2.24 per ounce

▶ **WHAT IT IS** True black salt, called kala namak or black Himalayan salt, comes from India and Pakistan. Heating the crystals gives them a rich aroma. Lava salt blends sea salt and activated charcoal, which can originate from a volcanic source. If you buy it coarse, you'll need to grind it.

▶ **HOW IT TASTES** Kala namak has eggy, umami flavor that bolsters legumes, root vegetables, and roasted nuts. Lava salt's slightly smoky profile pairs well with meats, poultry, and seafood.

Smoked

$2.50 to $8 per ounce

▶ **WHAT IT IS** This variety is made by roasting sea or kosher salt over wood. You can whip up your own by mixing a few drops of liquid smoke with ½ cup salt, Chavez says.

▶ **HOW IT TASTES** Mesquite and oak add straight-from-the-campfire flavor to meats, pork, poultry, and seafood, while fruity maple and apple offer a hint of sweetness. If the type of wood isn't called out on the front of a bottle's label, check the ingredients list.

PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD: BEN GOLDSTEIN; PROP STYLING: MIAKO KATOH (COOKIES)

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN GOLDSTEIN

Seasoning Secrets

Even a small amount of salt has flavor superpowers. It can balance bitter and sour notes in food and enhance savory and sweet ones, says Naomi Duguid, author of "The Miracle of Salt" (Artisan, 2022). Think of how a dash in a caprese salad offsets the tomatoes' acidity and plays up their natural sugars. Salt can add palate-pleasing contrast to sweet foods, which is why treats like chocolate pretzel cookies and caramel-miso ice cream are popular. Salt also alters texture: It tenderizes ingredients and helps create that satisfying crust on seared meats and roasted veggies. When it's a final flourish, the crunch from larger crystals gives a dash of sensory appeal. Knowing the best ways to add salt will help you use it more efficiently and deliciously.

WHEN YOU'RE

Cooking

Meat For better browning, pat steak dry and sprinkle on coarse salt just before you plop it into the pan. Some cooks salt tougher cuts such as brisket ahead of time to tenderize them; others don't think it's necessary. If you decide to, use about 1 teaspoon kosher salt per pound of meat and let it rest for 30 minutes per ½ inch of thickness, Duguid says. To season ground meat (beef, pork, or poultry), mix in about ½ tablespoon of kosher salt per pound.

Poultry Season raw chicken or turkey with ¾ teaspoon of kosher salt per pound, Duguid says. Wet brining can add juicy flavor to a whole bird. In a food-safe plastic bag or a stockpot, combine roughly 2 tablespoons of fine salt per quart of water. Refrigerate and let soak for 12 to 24 hours.

Seafood Seasoning fish and shellfish too soon can toughen their proteins, says Jesse Frederick, an instructor at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y. Use about ¼ teaspoon of kosher or sea salt per pound once you're ready to cook.

Soups, sauces, and braises Working in your preferred salt throughout the process of cooking liquids creates a more complex flavor, says Stephen Chavez at the Institute of Culinary Education. It can also reduce the sharpness of strongly flavored ingredients like onion and kale.

Vegetables In addition to softening potent flavors, salt breaks down plant fibers to shorten cooking. To keep watery veggies like eggplant and zucchini from getting mushy, sprinkle with kosher or fine salt about 10 minutes before cooking, then pat dry.

Pasta Nonna was right: Salting the water gives pasta flavor. Go with a tablespoon of table or fine sea salt–they dissolve fastest–for every 4 quarts of water and 1 pound of pasta. It won't absorb much: Some research shows that when pasta is cooked in about that same amount of salted water, it has no more than 130 mg of sodium per cup.

Grains To bring out the nutty flavors in brown rice and farro, toast them in a pan, then add water seasoned with around a teaspoon fine or ½ teaspoon kosher salt per cup of uncooked grain.

Eggs Adding a pinch of kosher or sea salt before whisking for a scramble or an omelet helps loosen protein bonds. "This creates fluffier eggs," Chavez says. Let the whisked egg sit for a few minutes to allow the salt to dissolve.

PHOTO, THIS PAGE: CLARA MANOLACHE/GETTY IMAGES. PHOTO, FACING PAGE: JAMIE GRILL/GETTY IMAGES

Sweets In baked goods, salt controls gluten and yeast development to create a soft texture, so don't cut back on what's indicated in a recipe. Salty-sweet desserts such as chocolate chip cookies often call for topping with flake salt. If you want to experiment–say, on fruit or ice cream–remember that a little goes a long way.

WHEN YOU'RE

Sprinkling

Seasoning food right before you eat it gives the most potent hit of salinity, and it doesn't take much. When salt is on the surface of a food, your tongue immediately registers the taste of the crystals, says Christopher Loss, PhD, the Louis Pasteur Lecturer in food science at Cornell University. That's the reason potato chips taste salty but may have less sodium than you might think. Follow these strategies for perfect results.

Taste, *then* salt You might find that a food doesn't need any. And it could help you assess whether adding something acidic, like lemon juice or vinegar, or spices would satisfy your flavor craving.

Tap into texture The bigger crystals in flake salt and coarse sea salt give a pronounced pop of flavor (along with a pleasing crunch) on baked potatoes or sliced cucumbers. Given that finely ground salts cover more surface area, they're best for foods where you want saltiness in every bite, such as popcorn and french fries.

Skip the shaker It's hard to judge how much you're shaking out. For better control, pour a bit into your palm. Or grab a pinch from a dish with your thumb and two forefingers.

Aim high "Sprinkle on salt from a few inches above the food," Chavez says. "This spreads it out for even distribution." Start with a small amount, taste, and add more if needed.

TOP SWAPS

If you're watching your sodium intake, check out these low- and no-sodium alternatives that can be used in place of table salt.

▼ SALT SUBSTITUTES
Brands such as No-Salt, Nu-Salt, and Morton's Salt Substitute swap in potassium chloride to mimic salty flavor. "In our taste evaluation of salt substitutes, testers reported a bitter aftertaste," says CR nutritionist Amy Keating, RD. Use it sparingly. If you have kidney disease, too much potassium may be dangerous, so talk to your doctor before using.

▼ LITE SALT
Also called low- and reduced-sodium salt, these products blend sodium chloride with potassium chloride and slash sodium by as much as 50 percent. CR's test found that Morton's Lite Salt tasted most like the real stuff.

▼ MSG
Short for monosodium glutamate, MSG is made of sodium and glutamate, a natural amino acid found in mushrooms and tomatoes. It has one-third the sodium of table salt. MSG has gotten a bad rap over the years, but the FDA has determined that it's safe for consumption. Our testers found the flavor to be more savory than salty, and liked it on popcorn. The only drawback was a slight metallic edge when sprinkled on rice and eggs.

Stay Safer in the Sun

It's never too late to start protecting yourself—and reducing the risk of skin cancer. From the best sunscreens to use to the symptoms you shouldn't ignore, we have the expert advice you need.

by Sally Wadyka • **Illustration by Michael Byers**

IF you spent your teenage summers oiling up with Bain de Soleil in pursuit of the perfect tan, you may think it's too late now to do anything to prevent skin cancer. "A lot of the skin damage that shows up in your later years does come from sun exposure earlier in life," says Karen Connolly, MD, a dermatologic surgeon at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in Basking Ridge, N.J. But sun damage is cumulative, so "how you behave in the sun now still matters."

Over 80 percent of skin cancers are caused by radiation emitted by the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. UVA rays penetrate into the deep layers of skin, weakening the collagen and elastin and causing sagging and wrinkles. The intensity of UVA rays remains constant throughout the day. UVB rays are the primary cause of sunburn and are strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Both types can alter skin cells' DNA, which can lead to skin cancer. "When you're young, the immune system repairs that early DNA damage," says Steven Q. Wang, MD, chair of the photobiology committee for the Skin Cancer Foundation. "But over the years, DNA mutations accumulate and the ability to repair them decreases."

That's why it's important to keep protecting your skin from harmful UV rays, no matter how much sun exposure you've already had–or even if you've had previous skin cancers.

3 GOLDEN RULES OF SUN SAFETY

1. **Cover Up**
   Hats, long sleeves, and long pants shield your skin from UV rays.
2. **Seek Shade**
   Umbrellas, awnings, and trees all help to protect you from direct sunlight.
3. **Use Sunscreen**
   Apply 15 minutes before going out and reapply at least every 2 hours.

Make Wearing Sunscreen a Habit

"People who consistently use sunscreen not only get fewer skin cancers, but if they do get them, they are less aggressive and can be treated more easily," says Joel Cohen, MD, director of AboutSkin Dermatology and Aesthetics in Greenwood Village, Colo.

And sunscreen isn't just for a day at the beach or pool. Applying a broad-spectrum sunscreen—one that protects against both UVA and UVB rays—with an SPF of at least 30 whenever you go outside should be a daily practice. "We get most of our sun damage at times we're not thinking about it and didn't plan for it—like running into a friend in a grocery store parking lot and talking for 15 minutes," says Paul Nghiem, MD, chair of the department of dermatology at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle.

Before you head out, be sure to apply enough to any skin that isn't covered by clothing. Use a teaspoon per body part or area: for your face, head, and neck; for each arm; for each leg; for your chest and abdomen, and for your back and the back of your neck. When you're in the sun for longer periods, reapply sunscreen every 2 hours or right after swimming or sweating.

CR's tests over the years have found that sunscreen performance varies, even among products with the same SPF and ingredients. All of the 81 lotions and sprays in our ratings are labeled SPF 30 or higher (see the ratings charts starting on page 63), but nearly 80 percent didn't meet that level of protection in our tests. We did find 16 products to recommend, including Coppertone WaterBabies Lotion SPF 50, which got a perfect Overall Score of 100. Our top-rated spray is Eucerin Advanced Hydration Spray SPF 50, which has a score of 88.

Our recommended sunscreens contain chemical active ingredients, such as avobenzone and octocrylene. Those with mineral active ingredients—titanium dioxide and zinc oxide—have consistently underperformed in CR's tests, falling in the middle and bottom of our ratings.

Some people prefer to avoid chemical sunscreens because of reports that the ingredients are absorbed through the skin and into the bloodstream. While studies have shown this to be the case, the significance isn't clear. There's no conclusive evidence that these chemicals are harmful, and it's important to balance their potential risks against the known risks of skin cancer from unprotected sun exposure.

If you prefer a mineral sunscreen, we suggest using the ones that got the highest scores in our tests: Badger Active Mineral Sunscreen Cream SPF 30, Aveeno Baby Continuous Protection Zinc Oxide Sunscreen SPF 50, or Blue Lizard Sport Mineral Spray SPF 50+.

Don't Rely on Sunscreen Alone

No product will filter out all of the sun's rays. For example, an SPF 50 blocks 98 percent of UVB rays—and that's only if you use it perfectly. "It's easy to miss spots, and most people don't apply enough," Wang says. "So in reality, your sunscreen may not be giving you all the protection you think you're getting."

There are several things you can do to keep the rays from hitting your skin in the first place.

The Best From Our Tests

Coppertone WaterBabies Lotion SPF 50
$9
100
OVERALL SCORE

Eucerin Advanced Hydration Spray SPF 50
$10
88
OVERALL SCORE

PHOTO: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

WORSE — BETTER | CR SMART BUY

- **Stay out of direct sunlight** as much as possible, especially at midday when the sun's rays are the strongest.
- **Walk on the shady side** of the street.
- **Use a sun umbrella** when you're sitting outside.
- **Wear a hat** with a wide brim so that it protects not only your scalp and face but also your neck and ears (spots where dermatologists find a lot of skin cancers).
- **Dress in long sleeves and pants** or long skirts when you can. At the beach or pool, wear a rash guard, swim shirt, or cover-up. Then you only need to apply sunscreen to any skin that's still uncovered.
- **Pick the right fabric.** Lightweight material will help keep you cool, but it can also let some UV light through. Tightly woven or synthetic fabrics screen out more UV light. You can also look for clothing with a UPF (ultraviolet protection factor) rating of 50 or higher.

Assess Your Skin Cancer Risk

Anyone, no matter their age or skin color, can get skin cancer. But not everyone's level of risk is the same. People with light skin, blond or red hair, and lots of freckles are at an increased risk because their skin contains little melanin, the pigment in skin that offers some protection.

Having darker skin can lower the risk somewhat, but it's no guarantee against developing skin cancer. And everyone's risk increases as they age (even if you've been diligent about protection) because the older you are, the more time your skin has had to develop the mutations that can lead to cancer.

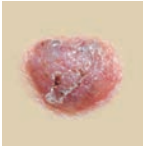
It's also important to look at factors in addition to age and skin color, including your lifestyle and family and personal history of skin cancer. People who work outdoors or whose hobbies keep them in the sun (golfers, skiers, gardeners, tennis players) are more prone to skin cancer. "And people who've already had one skin cancer have a higher risk of getting another one," Connolly says. "Because if you've gotten enough cumulative damage to develop skin cancer in one place, it's likely you've had enough to also develop skin cancer on other frequently sun-exposed skin."

WHAT SKIN CANCER LOOKS LIKE

Many dermatologists suggest that people do monthly head-to-toe skin self-checks. (You'll need a mirror or a partner to help you.) Don't forget commonly overlooked areas: the scalp, ears, underarms, under breasts, hands, the genital area, soles of feet, between your fingers and toes, and under fingernails and toenails. Here are some examples of what skin cancer may look like, but it can take other forms, so always see a doctor if you spot anything unusual.

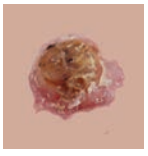
Basal cell carcinoma

The most common type of skin cancer, it may appear as shiny raised growths, sores that don't heal, or crusty, reddish patches.



Squamous cell carcinoma

This can show up as a rough patch that may crust or bleed, an open sore, or a pimplelike growth that won't go away.



Melanoma

It often originates as a new or changing mole or skin spot. Look for variations in color, two sides that appear different (below left), or irregular borders (center). Growths that change over time or are the size of a pencil eraser or larger are also potentially melanoma.

Acral lentiginous melanoma (ALM) follows a different pattern. It usually appears as a dark spot on the palms or soles of feet (below right) or as a dark band under a nail. ALM is the most common type of malignant melanoma in people with darker skin but occurs in all skin types.

If You See Something, Say Something

There are three main types of skin cancer: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma. The first two are the most common. They usually aren't fatal but can be disfiguring if not

PHOTOS: © SCIENCESOURCE.COM (6); BSIP SA/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (1)

removed. Melanoma can be deadly but is very treatable when caught early.

These cancers can appear in many guises and are easy to overlook. "I tell patients to look out for the 'ugly duckling,' the spot that stands out and doesn't look like anything else on your body," Connolly says. "It could be a new mole, something that looks like a pimple but won't go away, or a spot that is bleeding or not healing." (See "What Skin Cancer Looks Like," on page 61.)

Have anything that's new or looks suspicious checked by a dermatologist as soon as possible to determine if the growth is cancerous. The sooner skin cancer is diagnosed, the more easily and effectively it can be treated.

"Finding basal and squamous cell cancers when they're small sometimes means we can treat them without surgery," says Rebecca Hartman, MD, director of melanoma epidemiology at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Nonsurgical treatments include cryotherapy and chemotherapy creams.

"Even melanoma has a nearly 98 percent survival rate when we catch it at a small, localized stage," she says. Advanced cases are also becoming more treatable, thanks to recent developments in targeted therapy (which goes after specific genes) and immune therapy (which drives the immune system to seek and destroy melanoma cells).

See Your Doctor for Skin Checks

There's no universal prescription for how often people should see a dermatologist for a full-body skin cancer check because so much depends on individual risk factors. Most dermatologists agree that everyone should get a baseline exam, preferably in early adulthood. But if you didn't have one then, get one now. "The dermatologist will give you an expert opinion on your personal risks and a recommendation on how frequently you need to come back," Wang says. For people at very low risk (for example, those with darker skin or less lifetime sun exposure), that might be only once every few years. Those at very high risk (because of skin tone, family history, previous sunburns, or past skin cancers) may benefit from a professional look as often as two or more times a year.

Protecting Your Face

You can use the same sunscreen for your body and face, but facial formulas "don't clog pores and are made to blend easily into your skin tone," says Rebecca Hartman MD, a melanoma specialist. Here's more advice.

Check the water resistance

Most sunscreens on the market will protect you when your skin is wet, but that's not the case with all facial sunscreens. You probably don't need a water-resistant sunscreen as you go about your day, but if you'll be swimming or exercising outdoors, you definitely do.

Use enough

One full teaspoon (a blob about the size of a quarter) will effectively cover your face, neck, and ears. As with any sunscreen, you should reapply it every 2 hours.

Don't rely on makeup with SPF

It can add a little extra protection, but people don't typically use the amount of foundation it would take for it to double as a sunscreen.

CR members can find all of our facial sunscreen ratings at **CR.org/sunscreens**.

The Best Facial Sunscreens

78 OVERALL SCORE

Biore UV Aqua Rich SPF 50 Daily Moisturizer
Not water-resistant;
$16 for 1.7 ounces

67 OVERALL SCORE

Black Girl Sunscreen Make It Matte Gel SPF 45
Water-resistant;
$22 for 1.7 ounces

67 OVERALL SCORE

La Roche-Posay Toleriane Double Repair Face Moisturizer SPF 30 Not water-resistant;
$22 for 3.4 ounces

PHOTO: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Green Choice

Sunscreens that CR's sustainability experts say are better for the environment get this symbol. They contain mineral active ingredients (titanium dioxide, zinc oxide) and have an Overall Score of at least 40. Packaging must be minimal and recyclable. For more, go to **CR.org/gcsunscreens**.

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing: Cost per oz.	Pricing: Package price/ package size (oz.)	Test Results: UVA protection	Test Results: SPF	Test Results: CR's average tested SPF
SUNSCREEN LOTIONS						
Coppertone WaterBabies Lotion SPF 50	100	$1.14	$9/8.0 oz.	⏫	⏫	64
La Roche-Posay Anthelios Kids SPF 50 Face and Body	90	$4.92	$33/6.7 oz.	⏫	⏫	41
Everyday Humans Oh My Bod Sunscreen Lotion SPF 50	83	$5.29	$18/3.4 oz.	🔼	⏫	55
Supergoop Play Everyday Lotion SPF 50	80	$10.00	$24/2.4 oz.	⏫	🔼	34
Eucerin Advanced Hydration Lotion SPF 30	75	$2.00	$10/5.0 oz.	⏫	➖	27
Coppertone Every Tone Sunscreen Lotion SPF 50	75	$1.57	$11/7.0 oz.	⏫	🔼	31
La Roche-Posay Anthelios 60 Melt-in Sunscreen Milk	73	$7.60	$38/5.0 oz.	⏫	🔼	33
Alba Botanica Hawaiian Lotion SPF 30 Aloe Vera	70	$3.55	$11/3.0 oz.	⏫	➖	26
Dermalogica Sport Protection Lotion SPF 50	68	$6.79	$36/5.3 oz.	⏫	➖	27
Equate (Walmart) Ultra Lotion SPF 50	68	$0.91	$7/8.0 oz.	⏫	🔼	31
Solimo (Amazon) Baby Lotion SPF 50	64	$0.58	$5/8.0 oz.	🔼	🔼	31
Coppertone Sport 4-in-1 Performance Lotion SPF 50	63	$1.57	$11/7.0 oz.	🔼	🔼	32
Equate (Walmart) Sport Lotion SPF 50	61	$0.59	$5/8.0 oz.	🔼	➖	29
Equate (Walmart) Ultra Light Lotion for Face & Body SPF 50	60	$0.63	$5/8.0 oz.	🔼	➖	28
Neutrogena Ultra Sheer Dry Touch Sunscreen SPF 70	59	$3.33	$10/3.0 oz.	➖	🔼	39
Banana Boat Sport Ultra Lotion SPF 50+	57	$1.25	$10/8.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	20
Up & Up (Target) Sport Lotion SPF 50	56	$0.67	$7/10.4 oz.	🔼	➖	26
Hawaiian Tropic Sheer Touch Invisible Body Serum SPF 50	55	$3.94	$13/3.3 oz.	⏫	⏬	20
Black Girl Sunscreen Ultra Sheer Lotion SPF 30 Fragrance Free	55	$6.33	$19/3.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	16
Badger Active Mineral Sunscreen Cream SPF 30 Unscented [1][2]	55	$6.21	$18/2.9 oz.	⏫	⏬	16
Neutrogena Invisible Daily Defense Lotion SPF 60+	55	$4.80	$14/3.0 oz.	🔼	➖	25
Aveeno Baby Continuous Protection Zinc Oxide Sunscreen SPF 50 [1]	52	$5.00	$15/3.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	18
Aveeno Protect + Hydrate Lotion SPF 60	50	$3.67	$11/3.0 oz.	🔼	➖	21
Aveeno Kids Continuous Protection Mineral Sunscreen Lotion SPF 50 [1]	48	$4.33	$13/3.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	16
Hawaiian Tropic Sheer Touch Lotion SPF 50	47	$1.37	$11/8.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	16
Neutrogena Pure & Free Baby Lotion SPF 50 [1]	46	$4.66	$14/3.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	14
Hawaiian Tropic Everyday Active Sport Lotion SPF 30	46	$1.25	$10/8.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	11
Neutrogena Sheer Zinc Mineral Lotion SPF 50 [1]	45	$4.83	$15/3.0 oz.	🔼	⏬	16
Badger Kids Mineral Cream SPF 40 Tangerine & Vanilla [1]	45	$6.21	$18/2.9 oz.	⏫	⏬	11
Thinkbaby Lotion SPF 50 Lightly Scented [1]	44	$4.83	$14/3.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	12

[1] Mineral sunscreen. Contains zinc oxide, titanium dioxide, or both as the only active ingredients. [2] Water-resistant for 40 minutes.

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing		Test Results		
		Cost per oz.	Package price/ package size (oz.)	UVA protection	SPF	CR's average tested SPF
SUNSCREEN LOTIONS *Continued*						
Solimo (Amazon) Sport Sunscreen Lotion Broad Spectrum SPF 30	44	$0.75	$6/8.0 oz.	⏫	🔽	11
Neutrogena Hydro Boost Water Gel Lotion SPF 30	43	$4.06	$12/3.0 oz.	🔼	🔽	16
California Kids #Supersensitive Tinted Lotion SPF 30+	42	$8.28	$24/2.9 oz.	❗	🔽	19
Sun Bum Premium Lotion SPF 30	42	$2.31	$19/8.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	9
Babo Botanicals Clear Zinc Lotion SPF 30 Fragrance Free	42	$5.33	$16/3.0 oz.	🔼	🔽	14
Vacation Classic Sunscreen Lotion SPF 50	38	$3.00	$18/6.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	9
EleVen by Venus Williams Game Set Match Body Lotion SPF 50	38	$11.99	$38/3.17 oz.	🔼	🔽	12
Thrive Bodyshield Lotion SPF 50	37	$4.31	$25/5.8 oz.	🔼	🔽	12
Badger Sport Mineral Sunscreen Cream SPF 40	37	$5.17	$15/2.9 oz.	⏫	⏬	10
Walgreens Sport Lotion SPF 50 Fresh Scent	36	$1.27	$4/3.0 oz.	🔼	🔽	11
Hawaiian Tropic Matte Effect Lotion SPF 50+	35	$1.67	$10/6.0 oz.	🔽	❗	22
Banana Boat Baby Mineral Lotion SPF 50+	31	$1.83	$11/6.0 oz.	❗	🔽	12
Jack Black Performance Remedy Oil-Free Sun Guard Lotion SPF 45	30	$5.25	$21/4.0 oz.	⏬	❗	24
Blue Lizard Sensitive Mineral Lotion SPF 50+	29	$4.00	$20/5.0 oz.	🔽	🔽	14
CeraVe Hydrating Sheer Face & Body Lotion SPF 30	28	$3.33	$10/3.0 oz.	❗	🔽	10
Coppertone Pure & Simple Mineral Lotion SPF 50	28	$1.92	$12/6.0 oz.	🔼	⏬	7
Banana Boat Kids Sport Lotion SPF 50+	27	$2.17	$13/6.0 oz.	❗	⏬	8
Black Girl Sunscreen Make It Hybrid Lotion SPF 50 Fragrance Free	23	$6.33	$19/3.0 oz.	🔽	🔽	13
Black Girl Sunscreen Kids Lotion SPF 50	18	$3.33	$10/3.0 oz.	⏬	🔽	13
Australian Gold Botanical Mineral Lotion SPF 30	18	$3.60	$18/5.0 oz.	🔽	⏬	4
Coppertone Kids Tear Free Lotion SPF 50	17	$1.25	$10/8.0 oz.	⏬	🔽	13
SUNSCREEN SPRAYS						
Eucerin Advanced Hydration Spray SPF 50	88	$1.67	$10/6 oz.	⏫	🔼	39
Black Girl Sunscreen Kids Spray & Play SPF 50	77	$2.00	$12/6 oz.	⏫	🔼	36
Trader Joe's Spray SPF 50+	74	$1.00	$6/6 oz.	⏫	🔼	34
Neutrogena Beach Defense Water+Sun Protection Spray SPF 50	71	$1.69	$11/6.5 oz.	⏫	🔼	32
Black Girl Sunscreen Make It Glow Spray SPF 30	68	$6.33	$19/3.0	⏫	❗	26
Sun Bum Premium Spray SPF 50	67	$3.08	$19/6.0 oz.	🔼	🔼	33
Neutrogena Ultra Sheer Body Mist SPF 70	66	$2.60	$13/5.0 oz.	❗	⏫	41
Australian Gold Ultimate Hydration Continuous Spray SPF 30	66	$2.08	$13/6.0 oz.	⏫	❗	21

PHOTO: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing		Test Results		
		Cost per oz.	Package price/ package size (oz.)	UVA protection	SPF	CR's average tested SPF
SUNSCREEN SPRAYS *Continued*						
Equate (Walmart) Sport Spray SPF 50	65	$0.85	$5/5.5 oz.	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	30
La Roche-Posay Anthelios Ultra Light Spray Lotion SPF 60	65	$5.40	$27/5.0 oz.	⌃⌃	!	26
Up & Up (Target) Sport Sunscreen Spray SPF 50	64	$0.91	$5/5.5 oz.	⌃⌃	!	29
Alba Botanica Hawaiian Spray SPF 50 Coconut	63	$2.00	$10/5.0 oz.	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	31
Coppertone Complete Spray SPF 50	58	$2.18	$12/5.5 oz.	⌃⌃	!	23
Coppertone Sport 4-in-1 Performance Spray SPF 50	55	$1.82	$10/5.5 oz.	⌃⌃	⌄⌄	19
Banana Boat Sport Cool Zone Spray SPF 30	53	$2.08	$13/6.0 oz.	⌃⌃	⌄⌄	18
Hawaiian Tropic Skin Defense Mist SPF 30	51	$2.94	$10/3.4 oz.	⌃⌃	⌄⌄	15
Coola Classic Spray SPF 70 Peach Blossom	51	$4.67	$28/6.0 oz.	⌃⌃	⌄⌄	16
Blue Lizard Sport Mineral Spray SPF 50+ Unscented	50	$3.80	$19/5.0 oz.	⌃⌃	⌄⌄	15
Coppertone Glow Shimmer Spray SPF 30	49	$2.40	$12/5.0 oz.	⌃⌃	⌄⌄	13
Oars + Alps Hydrating Antioxidant Spray SPF 50	47	$3.00	$18/6.0 oz.	⌃	⌄⌄	20
Banana Boat Kids Clear Spray SPF 65+	45	$1.67	$10/6.0 oz.	!	!	22
Hawaiian Tropic Weightless Hydration Clear Spray SPF 50	43	$1.83	$11/6.0 oz.	⌃	⌄⌄	18
Supergoop Sunnyscreen Mineral Spray SPF50	41	$8.82	$30/3.4 oz.	!	⌄⌄	18
Hawaiian Tropic Everyday Active Sport Spray SPF 50	39	$1.83	$11/6.0 oz.	⌃	⌄⌄	13
Coppertone Sport Mineral Spray SPF 50	37	$2.40	$12/5.0 oz.	!	⌄⌄	13
Thinksport All Sheer Mineral Spray SPF 50	33	$3.17	$19/6.0 oz.	!	⌄⌄	12
Banana Boat Baby Mineral Enriched Spray SPF 50	31	$1.67	$10/6.0 oz.	⌄⌄	⌄⌄	19
Coola Mineral Spray SPF 30 Fragrance-Free	31	$6.40	$32/5.0 oz.	⌃	⌄⌄	8
Supergoop Play Antioxidant Mist SPF 50	30	$3.50	$21/6.0 oz.	⌃	⌄⌄	8
Soleil Toujours Clean Conscious Antioxidant Mist SPF 50	16	$6.00	$36/6.0 oz.	⌄⌄	⌄⌄	14

HOW WE TEST: We use the Food and Drug Administration's sunscreen testing protocol as a model. But as with all products, we do our own scientific, laboratory-based testing to identify differences in performance and give consumers a comparative evaluation. We buy sunscreens at retailers the way consumers do and test three samples of each product, each from different manufacturing batches. For **SPF,** we test the sunscreens on three people, which is fewer than the FDA's protocol calls for, but we use a statistical analysis to verify our results. A technician applies a standard amount of each product to a 2x3-inch rectangle on a panelist's back. (If the product is water-resistant, they soak in water for 40 or 80 minutes based on the product's resistance claims.) Then we expose smaller sections of the rectangle to five or six intensities of simulated sunlight based on how quickly the panelist's skin burns without protection. We also use a reference sunscreen with known performance to ensure accuracy. A day later, a technician examines the skin for redness and determines the sunscreen's SPF. To test for **UVA,** we apply sunscreen to plastic plates, expose them to UV light, and measure the amount of UVA and UVB rays that are absorbed. This test, like the UVA test in Europe, uses a process similar to the UVA test the FDA requires. But the test we use allows us to determine the degree of UVA protection, while the FDA test does not. The FDA test is pass-fail; a sunscreen that just passes gets the same designation—broad-spectrum—as one that screens out even more UVA. Our ratings are developed from the average results of all the SPF and UVA tests for a sunscreen, as well as how much the average CR-tested SPF varies from the SPF listed on the label.

SAVE ON

HOME INSURANCE

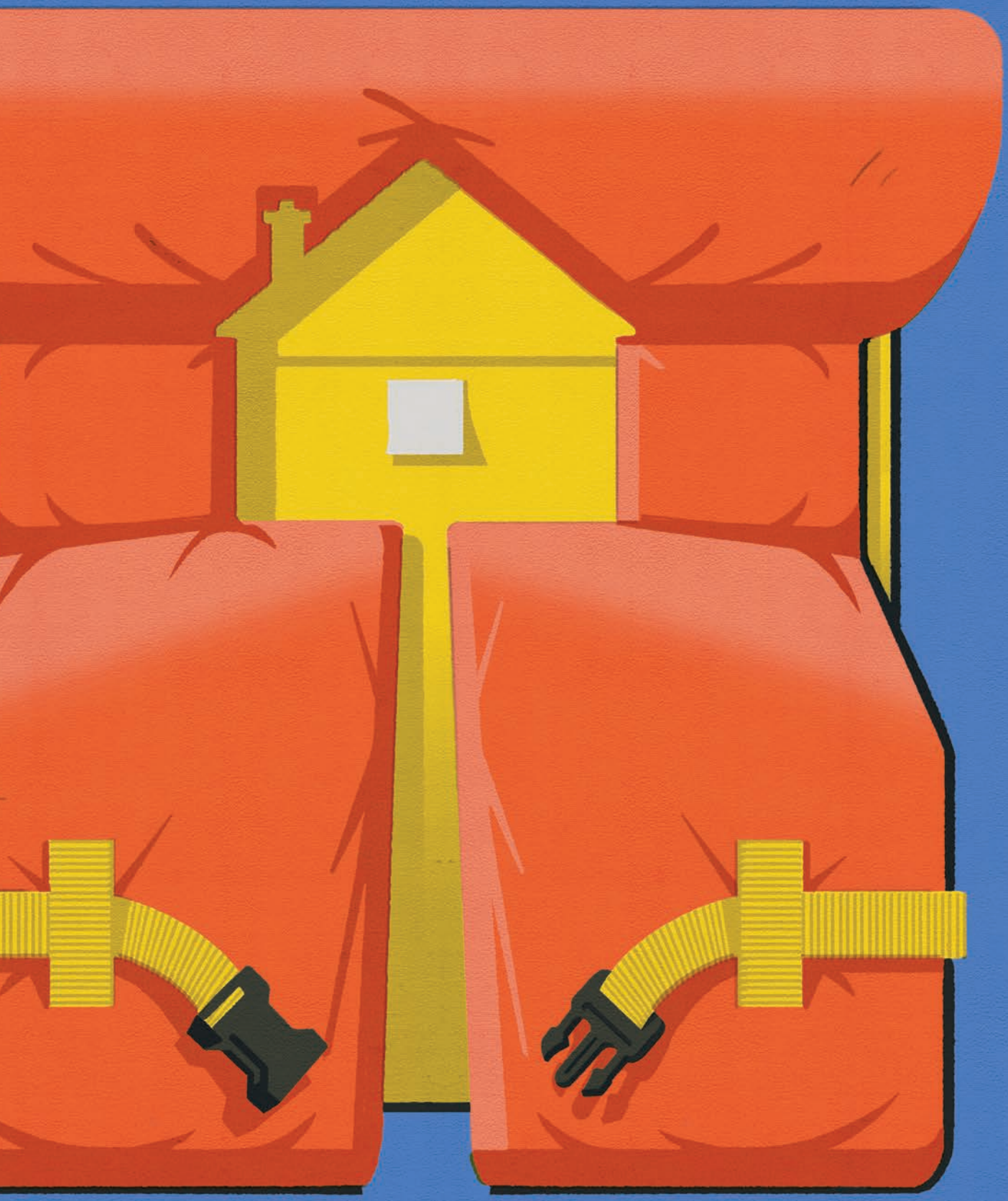
Rates are going up by double digits nationwide. But there are ways to keep premiums under control and still get the coverage you need. ***PLUS****, our best (and worst) home insurer ratings.*

BY LISA L. GILL • ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETER THOMAS RYAN

If you've received a homeowners insurance policy renewal lately, your rate may have taken your breath away. Increases averaging about 25 percent are the new normal, says Chuck Bell, a CR policy advocate. In fact, a September 2024 CR nationally representative survey of 2,146 adults in the U.S. found that 83 percent of homeowners who had the same insurer for at least five years saw their rates go up. Of those, about 1 in 10 said they jumped 50 percent or more.

Reports by various federal agencies point to the culprits. First up: inflation, which has triggered a 40 percent hike in labor and costs for building materials that insurers build into your premiums. Another is the significant rise in natural disasters in the U.S. over the past decades, which has cost a billion dollars plus. And reinsurance—a coverage that insurance companies buy to cover their own risks—doubled between 2017 and 2023, an increase passed on to you.

So price hikes are par for the course right now. If you're facing one, consider finding a local, independent insurance broker to help you research your options. They may be able to find smaller insurers that operate



only in your region or state, Bell says. You may also be able to reduce costs by bundling home and auto coverage or increasing your deductible. And use our ratings on page 71 to find top-performing home insurance companies.

But it's possible you're facing even worse problems than just rising costs. Some homeowners are losing coverage entirely as insurers across the U.S. aggressively cancel policies or leave certain markets. Allstate and State Farm, for example, have stopped writing new policies in California, and Farmers and Progressive have done the same in Florida.

When CR asked its members to share their experiences with giant price hikes, canceled policies, and the challenges of finding coverage, we received more than 600 responses. Here, we highlight three stories that demonstrate the difficulties and offer expert advice on what to do if you face them.

PHOTOS, FROM LEFT: THE HARRISONS; THE WILKINS

PRICEY PROBLEM #1

Your Rates Skyrocketed

When Tom and Cammy Harrison received their renewal paperwork earlier this year, they were stunned to see that their premium would be increasing by 63 percent–from $2,940 to $4,800 per year–even though their home isn't in a dangerous weather or wildfire zone.

Tom called their insurance broker, who said many of his customers were experiencing a similar problem. But there was some good news: The broker found that Tom had a strong credit-based insurance score. This FICO-based rating uses a person's credit report information, such as payment history and debt, to determine the likelihood they'll file a claim in the future.

Some insurers use it as a factor to calculate premiums, but Tom's hadn't been doing that. The broker presented the score to the insurer and ultimately got the Harrisons' increase lowered to "only" 20 percent higher–an extra $50 per month instead of the $150 they were first quoted.

TOM & CAMMY HARRISON

CARMEL, IND.
HOMEOWNERS OF 21 YEARS

"My insurance broker said he would check my insurance credit score. I'd never heard of that before. But because it was high, it helped me get a better rate."

WHAT TO DO

▸ **Start by contacting your insurer.** Ask for the reason for the increase along with any documentation, such as inspection notes or photos. (If you work with a broker, ask them to do this.) Consider making any upgrades the insurer suggests to lower your rate.

▸ **If necessary, appeal.** This is what the Harrisons' broker did, and it's helpful when an insurer doesn't offer a specific reason for a price hike. This isn't a formal process. You just try to offer the insurer new information that could help your case, showing it that you just added a new roof, for example, or that you have a high credit-based insurance score. (If you use a broker, ask them to look it up.)

▸ **Consider changes to the policy to reduce costs.** One option is to add a separate "disaster deductible"–typically 1 to 5 percent of the home's value–for major events such as hail damage. This is in addition to your standard deductible for more routine problems like burst pipes, according to the Insurance Information Institute.

If you carry a mortgage, consider changing your dwelling coverage to 80 percent of the total replacement cost (most lenders won't let you go lower than that). But if you own your home outright, you could go lower–say, to 50 percent–though you should have money set aside to cover your costs

if something happens. Either approach can be a gamble because you're not fully covered if disaster strikes, but you could lower your premium by hundreds of dollars or more.

PRICEY PROBLEM #2

Your Policy Wasn't Renewed

Last year, William Wilkin received two letters from his insurer—one saying the company wouldn't renew his policy unless he fixed his roof, then a second surprise letter saying it wouldn't be renewed at all,

WILLIAM WILKIN

NASHVILLE, TENN.
HOMEOWNER OF 31 YEARS

"Working with an agent was very helpful. It helped me get my policy renewed."

with no further explanation. He called his broker, who was able to obtain the satellite photos the insurer used to decide his house's roof was in bad condition. But the broker could see that the images were of poor quality, obscured by shadows from trees.

Wilkin hired a professional to inspect and photograph the roof, and his broker sent the findings to the insurer. (The roofer found it to be in good condition.) He was able to renew the policy—albeit with a 15 percent increase.

WHAT TO DO

▶ **Act fast.** If your policy's expiration date is less than two months away, call the insurer to ask for a courtesy extension, says CR's Bell. If granted, this can give you enough time to make repairs that might allow for a reconsideration or shop for new coverage.

While you have the insurer on the phone, ask for a written explanation for why you were dropped, and request any images used to justify the decision. And if your insurer identifies a problem, offer to make repairs or other changes to your house so that you can be reconsidered for coverage.

▶ **Check your property's claim history.** Errors in the record can affect your coverage eligibility. An industry database, the Comprehensive Loss Underwriting Exchange (CLUE), tracks claims information. If one has been incorrectly attributed to you, it could increase your coverage costs or cause an insurer to drop you altogether. Request a free CLUE report by calling 866-897-8126 (select option 1 for consumer disclosure). Find an error? Call 888-497-0011 for help in filing a dispute.

Consider applying public pressure if you think the nonrenewal isn't justified. That's what Laura Morris' family in Greenville, S.C., did after receiving a nonrenewal notice following Hurricane Helene. Laura contacted her local TV station (and CR) for help. Once her story was made public, the insurer reversed course and reinstated her coverage. Bell suggests taking your situation to social media by posting on X, Instagram, or Facebook, making sure you tag the company directly.

PRICEY PROBLEM #3

No Insurer Will Cover You

Last fall, Art Rozum and his wife, Christine, got the news that their insurer was pulling out of Washington state. But when their broker searched for a replacement, she found that none of the traditional insurance companies would cover the home.

The couple ended up with what's called an Excess and Surplus policy (or E&S), paying one and half times more than they had been. The policy doesn't cover earthquakes–they have a separate policy for that–but the coverage limit is actually higher than with their former insurer, Art says. There's more information on E&S policies later on this page.

ART & CHRISTINE ROZUM

CAMAS, WASH.
HOMEOWNERS OF 3 YEARS

"I built my house to be fire-resistant. It never crossed my mind I might not be able to insure it."

WHAT TO DO

▶ **See whether your state offers a FAIR (Fair Access to Insurance Requirements) plan.** These last-resort policies are for homeowners who can't get standard coverage.

At least 35 states and Washington, D.C., offer them. But those policies have coverage limits. For example, the FAIR plan in Texas only insures houses worth less than $1 million; in California, it's $3 million. (The Rozums' house in Washington wasn't eligible because its value exceeded the state's limit.)

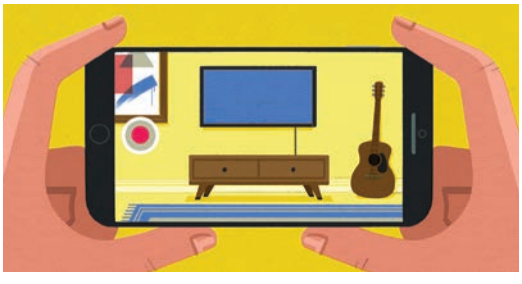
Sharon Maxwell in Soquel, Calif., resorted to buying a FAIR plan in 2022 after her insurer left the state and she couldn't find another. But her premium nearly doubled and she had to buy additional liability coverage because the plan offered too little. "It feels like extortion," says Maxwell, who adds that there aren't a lot of options when looking at these plans.

"But while it can be pricey and limited, FAIR insurance is better than going without," Bell says.

▶ **If a FAIR plan isn't an option, look for an Excess & Surplus (E&S) policy.** These are offered by "non-admitted" insurers, which means they aren't state-regulated and therefore can have higher deductibles and more exclusions than traditional plans. They can be risky because if the company goes belly-up due to big losses, you'll have little legal recourse when trying to file a claim. To reduce the risk, stick with large, established carriers, such as AIG and Lloyd's of London, that are less likely to go bankrupt in the event of a disaster.

DO THIS RIGHT NOW

Creating a home inventory—a comprehensive list of your possessions—can help you settle an insurance claim faster. This inventory–which you can create by using your phone to video record or photograph your home's contents and saving the images to the cloud–can also come in handy for right-sizing the amount of insurance you need to buy. Here are a few tips.



Do a room-by-room walk-through.

▶ Focus on capturing video of valuable and big items—electronics and appliances (and if possible, capturing serial numbers), musical instruments, artwork, furniture, rugs, and antiques. Also open drawers and closets to make a record of jewelry, clothing, and any collectible items of value. If you remember what you paid, say it out loud to record the amount. If you have receipts, snap pictures of them.

Don't sweat the small stuff.

▶ Insurance adjusters are likely to create "bulk estimates" for smaller items, so you don't have to worry about videotaping the contents of, say, your broom closet.

Record important documents.

▶ These should include your driver's license and passport, as well as banking and other financial records, including account numbers and passwords. If they're not already in a safe deposit box, also make sure to get a video record of the following: birth and death certificates, Social Security cards, military records, marriage and divorce decrees, life insurance policies, and documents related to estate planning.

PHOTO: THE ROZUMS

Company	Reader Survey Results									
	Overall Satisfaction Score	Premiums	Claims	Coverage	Policy clarity	Help and advice	Policy review	Service	Website	Mobile app
HOME INSURANCE COMPANIES										
NJM Insurance Group	69		–							
Erie Insurance Group	68									
USAA Group	63									
Acuity Insurance	57		–							
Auto Club Enterprises Insurance Group	53									
CSAA Insurance Group	53									
Farm Bureau Property & Casualty Group	51									
Amica Mutual Group	50									
Auto Owners Insurance Group	48									
Auto Club Group	45									
Shelter Insurance	45									
State Farm Group	45									
Progressive Corporation	44									
Country Financial Property Casualty Group	42		–							
Chubb INA Group	41		–							
Travelers Group	41									
Mercury General Corporation	41		–							
Nationwide Group	40									
NYCM Insurance Group	39		–							
Allstate Insurance Group	38									
Hanover Insurance Group Property and Casualty Companies	38									
Farmers Insurance Group	34									
American Family Insurance Group	34									
Liberty Mutual Insurance Companies	32									
Tower Hill Group	30		–							
Hartford Insurance Group	30									
American International Group (AIG)	27		–							
Citizens Property Insurance Corporation	14		–							

HOW WE SURVEY: Ratings are based on a national sample of 23,917 adult homeowners insurance policyholders in the U.S. who reported on 26,936 experiences with insurance companies. Ratings include current and prior insurers used between 2020 and 2024. The sample is weighted to be representative of all U.S. homeowners policyholders. The **Overall Satisfaction Score** is derived from ratings of specific insurer attributes. A gray dash (–) indicates that we have insufficient data to provide a rating.

WORSE — BETTER

CR'S ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

HOME U

It's the rare day that our homes *don't* need something from us.

Floors are perennial dirt magnets. Door pulls demand tightening. Interior walls need repainting every few years—with plenty of touch-ups along the way. And if you have a deck and yard to take care of, the to-do list only grows.

Better tools have eased some of the work. The trick is finding the ones that simplify chores and maximize the time between tasks.

Here, we've highlighted the very best indoor and outdoor gear to make caring for your home a little more manageable, without blowing money on gimmicky gadgets or pricey service people.

WHAT'S INSIDE

VACUUMS P. 74

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SMOKE & CO ALARMS P. 80

INTERIOR PAINTS P. 82

EXTERIOR PAINTS P. 83

WOOD STAINS P. 84

PRESSURE WASHERS P. 86

LAWN MOWERS P. 88

STRING TRIMMERS P. 90

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CORDLESS DRILLS & IMPACT DRIVERS P. 94

REPLACEMENT WINDOWS P. 96

ILLUSTRATION BY SEAN MCCABE

UPKEEP

HONDA
FLEX
24V
valspar
DURAMAX
PAINT + PRIMER
EXCEPTIONAL COVERAGE & DURABILITY
73754 White
INDUCER MOTOR
HEPA
FILTRATION
DIRECTDRIVE
ALLFLOORS

VACUUMS

A full-sized upright or canister model is the best bet for routine cleaning in most homes. Smaller vacuums—stick vacs and handhelds—come in handy for tackling small messes and spills between deep cleanings. A robovac can manage regular light upkeep at the touch of a button. You can even program it to patrol for dirt at the same time each day.

▸ **HOW TO SHOP** The layout of your house, along with your flooring, should dictate which kind of vacuum you buy.

A full-sized vacuum, either an upright or a canister, is your best bet for thoroughly cleaning both carpets and hardwood floors. While these vacuums tend to be heavier than stick and handheld vacuums, they also produce stronger suction. If you have a lot of carpet, consider an upright; because the machine's full weight is centered over the powerhead, it can dig deeper into carpet fibers. Canister vacuums are best for homes with lots of bare floors, and for multilevel homes because their two-part design makes them easier to carry up and down stairs.

One of the main decisions you'll have with a full-sized vacuum is whether to buy a bagged or bagless model. Disposable bags are better at containing the dust and debris they collect, which is particularly helpful if you suffer from allergies or asthma. But bagged models tend to be heavier than bagless styles, pricier to own because you need to buy the bags, and worse for the environment—every time the vacuum fills up, you're tossing out a bag.

Stick vacuums fall into two main categories: corded and cordless. A cordless stick vacuum is more convenient to use because you're not tethered to an outlet, though you do need to remember to recharge it. However, our surveys find that the batteries often get depleted, failing to hold a charge for long or eventually dying entirely. (Some manufacturers, including Dyson and Shark, sell replacement batteries.)

Robotic vacuums can ease your cleaning routine, dutifully vacuuming on their own on a regular schedule. Many new models come with self-cleaning bases that automatically empty the contents of the vacuum's small built-in dirt bin. That allows you to go up to a month without emptying it.

▸ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't run a stick vacuum on the high setting all the time. You'll deplete the battery faster, and our tests find that most good models clean bare floors well even on the normal power setting.

EXPERT TIP

"Before you buy a bagged upright or canister, check the price for replacement bags. Some models require bags that cost $5 or more, which is a considerable expense over the life of the vacuum."

SUSAN BOOTH Senior Test Leader for Vacuum Cleaners

Shark PowerDetect AZ4002
$500

82
OVERALL SCORE

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results							Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Carpet	Bare floors	Hose suction	Clean emissions	Handling	Pet hair	Noise	Weight (lb.)	Cord length (ft.)	Brush on/off switch	Easy on/off switch	Manual-pile adjust	Suction control	Retractable cord	HEPA filter
BAGLESS UPRIGHT VACUUMS																			
Shark PowerDetect AZ4002	82	$500	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	17	27		●				●
Shark Navigator Professional NV360	78	$200	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	!	⌃⌃	⌃	14	25	●			●		●
Shark Stratos AZ3002	77	$500	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	!	17	30		●		●		●
Shark Navigator Lift-Away LA300	76	$239	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	12	25				●		●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results							Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Carpet	Bare floors	Hose suction	Clean emissions	Handling	Pet hair	Noise	Weight (lb.)	Cord length (ft.)	Brush on/off switch	Easy on/off switch	Manual-pile adjust	Suction control	Retractable cord	HEPA filter
BAGLESS UPRIGHT VACUUMS *Continued*																			
✓ **Shark** Vertex DuoClean AZ2002	75	$450	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	17	30		●		●		●
$ **Kenmore** Pet Friendly Cross-Over DU3017	75	$200	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	17	25	●			●		●
✓ **Shark** Rotator Professional Lift-Away NV501	73	$275	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲	17	30	●			●		●
✓ **Kenmore** DU2055	73	$228	●	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	14	31	●			●		●
✓ **Shark** Navigator Professional Lift-Away NV356E	72	$200	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	●	●	16	30	●			●		●
✓ **Kenmore** DU5092	71	$200	●	●	●	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	15	31	●			●		●
✓ **Shark** Navigator Lift-Away NV352	71	$200	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	●	●	14	25	●			●		●
$ **Shark** Navigator Swivel Pro Complete NV150	70	$138	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	13	25				●		●
Dyson Ball 3 Animal	66	$400	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	●	18	36	●		●			●
Shark Navigator Pet Pro ZU62	64	$244	▲	▲▲	▼	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	15	25				●		●
Bissell MultiClean Allergen Pet Lift-Off 2998	63	$237	●	▼	●	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	15	30	●			●		●
Bissell Pet Hair Eraser Turbo Lift-Off 3774F	61	$280	●	▼	●	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	15	27	●			●		●
BAGGED UPRIGHT VACUUMS																			
$ **Kenmore** Elite Pet Friendly 31150	77	$330	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	21	35	●	●	●	●		●
$ **Kenmore** BU1018	75	$350	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▼	21	30		●	●	●		●
$ **Kenmore** Intuition BU4050	74	$200	●	●	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	15	30	●			●		●
$ **Kenmore** Pet Friendly 31140	73	$249	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	20	29	●	●	●	●		●
Oreck Elevate Command	61	$446	●	●	▲	▲▲	▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	11	30		●		●		●
Oreck Elevate Conquer	61	$514	●	●	▲	▲▲	▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	12	35		●		●		●
Oreck Elevate Control	54	$320	●	●	●	▲▲	▼	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▼	10	30		●				●
BAGLESS CANISTER VACUUMS																			
✓ **Miele** Blizzard CX1 Cat & Dog	76	$949	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	15	21	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓ **Kenmore** 500 Series DC5070	74	$275	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	19	24	●	●		●	●	●
✓ **Kenmore** 22614	72	$279	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▼	▲▲	●	23	24	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓ **Miele** Boost CX1 SNRF0	71	$479	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▼	▲▲	▲▲	17	21	NA		●	●	●	●
Eureka NEN180	50	$130	▲	●	▼▼	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	▲	▲▲	13	15	NA	●		●	●	●
Dirt Devil SD40201	48	$100	–	–	▼▼	▲▲	▼	▲▲	●	▲	▲▲	12	15	NA	●		●	●	
BAGGED CANISTER VACUUMS																			
✓ **Miele** Complete C3 Marin	81	$1,369	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	22	25	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓ **Kenmore** Elite Pet Friendly UltraPlush 81714	76	$400	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	25	26	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓ **Kenmore** Elite Pet Friendly CrossOver 21814	76	$417	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▼	▲	●	26	27	●	●	●	●	●	●
$ **Kenmore** Pop-N-Go BC4026	76	$297	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲	22	26	●	●	●	●	●	●
$ **Kenmore** 200 Series BC4002	75	$244	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	●	19	24	●	●	●	●	●	●
$ **Kenmore** 400 Series 81414	73	$250	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	●	●	▲▲	●	19	25	●	●	●	●	●	●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results							Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Carpet	Bare floors	Hose suction	Clean emissions	Handling	Pet hair	Noise	Weight (lb.)	Cord length (ft.)	Brush on/off switch	Easy on/off switch	Manual-pile adjust	Suction control	Retractable cord	HEPA filter
BAGGED CANISTER VACUUMS *Continued*																			
Kenmore 200 Series BC4002	75	$244	◐	◐	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	◐	▲▲	◐	19	24	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kenmore 400 Series 81414	73	$250	◐	◐	▲	▲▲	▲	◐	◐	▲▲	◐	19	25	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kenmore 200 Series 81214	72	$230	◐	◐	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	◐	▲▲	◐	19	24	●	●	●	●	●	●
Miele Complete C3 Calima Powerline SGFE0	68	$839	▲▲	▲▲	▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	◐	▲	▲	16	24		●		●	●	●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features + Specs					
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Carpet	Bare floors	Edges	Noise	Pet hair	Clean emissions	Run time (min.)	Charge time (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Battery type	Cord length (ft.)	Brush on/off
CORDED STICK VACUUMS																
Shark PowerDetect HZ4002	87	$280	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	NA	NA	9.3		30	
Shark UltraLight PetPro HZ702	72	$230	▲▲	▲	◐	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	◐	NA	NA	8.1		25	
CORDLESS STICK VACUUMS																
Samsung Bespoke Jet AI VS28C9762UK/AA	86	$1,000	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	55	6	7.0	25.2V lithium-ion		
Miele Duoflex HX1	81	$550	▲	▲▲	◐	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	18	4	7.0	25.2V lithium-ion		
Miele Triflex HX2	80	$750	▲	▲▲	◐	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	20	4	8.0	25.2V lithium-ion		
Samsung Jet 85 VS20C8522TW	80	$500	▲	▲	◐	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	31	4	5.9	25.2V lithium-ion		
Miele Triflex HX1 Facelift SMUL1	79	$600	▲	▲▲	◐	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	25	4	8.0	25.2V lithium-ion		
LG CordZero All-in-One A949KTMS	78	$1,000	◐	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	23	5	6.9	25.2V lithium-ion		
Shark Vertex Pro IZ662H	75	$450	◐	▲	◐	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	30	4	8.9	25.2V lithium-ion		
Shark Stratos IZ862H	74	$500	◐	▲	◐	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	40	4	8.9	25.2V lithium-ion		
Tineco Pure One S12	71	$650	–	–	◐	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	15	4	6.6	21.6V lithium-ion		
Dyson V15 Detect+ Cordless	69	$750	▼	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	40	5	7.1	25.2V lithium-ion		
Dyson Gen5detect	68	$950	▼	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	40	5	7.6	36V lithium-ion		
Tineco GO203 VA170200US	68	$250	–	–	◐	◐	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	24	6	6.4	21.6V lithium-ion		
Dyson Gen5outsize	67	$1,050	▼	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	40	5	8.5	36V lithium-ion		
Greenworks 24V Green 4705202	67	$260	–	–	◐	◐	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	◐	25	1	6.5	21.6V lithium-ion		
Dyson V15 Detect	67	$750	▼	▲	◐	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	40	5	6.85	25.2V lithium-ion		
Tineco A10-D Plus	66	$150	–	–	▼	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	15	4	4.99	22.2V lithium-ion		
Electrolux Ultimate800 EHVS85P3AG	65	$500	◐	▼	◐	◐	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	20	3	6.5	25.2V lithium-ion		
Shark Detect Pro IW3511	63	$450	◐	▲	▼	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	25	5	6.0	21.6V lithium-ion		
Dyson V12 Detect Slim Absolute	63	$650	▼	▲	◐	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	30	4	5.2	25.2V lithium-ion		

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features + Specs					
			Carpet	Bare floors	Edges	Pet hair	Noise	Run time (min.)	Charge time (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Battery type	Cord length (ft.)	Clean emissions
HANDHELD VACUUMS													
Shark Ion W1 WV201	80	$130	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	10	3	1.4	10.8V lithium-ion	0	●
Black+Decker Max+ DustBuster AdvancedClean+ HHVK515J00	79	$90	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	23	5	2.7	20V lithium-ion	0	●
Black+Decker DustBuster CHV1410L	78	$60	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	9	4	2.6	16V lithium-ion	0	●
Black+Decker Flex BDH2020FL	77	$115	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	15	4	3.1	20V lithium-ion	0	●
Black+Decker DustBuster Ion HHVI315JO42	76	$50	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	11	5	2.1	10.8V lithium-ion	0	●
Dirt Devil Deep Clean+ BD30300V	73	$80	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	16	5	2.5	16V lithium-ion	0	●
Black+Decker DustBuster Pivot BDH2000PL	72	$80	▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	10	4	2.9	20V lithium-ion	0	●
Black+Decker BDH2000L	72	$90	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	11	4	2.7	20V lithium-ion	0	●
Black+Decker Max AdvancedClean 12V HHVK320J61	72	$70	●	▲▲	●	▲	●	14	5	2.4	10.8V lithium-ion	0	●
Shark UltraCyclone Pro CH901	70	$80	●	▲	●	▲	▲▲	10	6	2.8	7.2V lithium-ion	0	●
Shark Wandvac WV410	70	$150	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	12	4	1.5	14.4V lithium-ion	0	●
Shark Cyclone CH700WM	70	$60	▲	▲	●	▲	▲▲	10	6	1.5	7.2V lithium-ion	0	●
Dirt Devil Whole Home BD40200V	70	$65	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	11	6	2.3	12V lithium-ion	0	●
Shark UltraCyclone Pet Pro+ CH951	70	$90	●	▲	●	▲▲	▲	12	6	2.8	10.8V lithium-ion	0	●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results									Features + Specs			
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Carpet	Bare floors	Navigation	Pet hair	Edges	Ease of use	Noise	Data privacy	Data security	Pattern	Clearance (in.)	Run time (min.)	WiFi/cellular connectivity
ROBOTIC VACUUMS																	
Roborock S8 Pro Ultra	75	$1,600	–	–	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▼	▲	Grid	4.0	100	●
Dyson 360 Vis Nav	73	$1,200	–	–	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▼	▲	Grid	4.0	50	●
iRobot Roomba Combo i5	72	$350	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	●	▲	Grid	3.5	90	●
iRobot Roomba Combo j9+	72	$1,399	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲	Grid	3.8	50	●
Eufy RoboVac X8	70	$435	▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	▼	●	Grid	3.9	80	●
iRobot Roomba Combo j5+	70	$690	●	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	Grid	3.5	80	●

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at **CR.org/vacuums**.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on performance ratings, along with scores for predicted reliability (which estimates the likelihood that newly purchased models will develop problems or break within the first five years of ownership for upright, stick, and canister vacuums, and the first four years of ownership for robotic vacuums, according to our member surveys) and owner satisfaction (the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend their vacuum). A gray dash (–) indicates insufficient data for brand-level rating. We test upright vacs and canisters on their ability to pick up debris from **carpet** and **bare floors** and **pet hair.** We also consider their **ease of use, noise** levels, **hose suction** strength, and the vacuum's ability to minimize the release of dust, allergens, and other particles into the air while vacuuming. For stick and handheld vacs, our methods of evaluating how well they clean are similar, but we calibrate for these less powerful machines. We test robot vacs with obstacles such as carpet fringe, cords, and debris. To assess **navigation,** we map their movements with a tracking device. We also conduct **data privacy** and **security** tests.

CARPET CLEANERS

Carpet cleaners use detergents and jets of water to remove deeply embedded dirt, including stains from pets. For those tasks, they are more effective than vacuums. You can rent a carpet cleaner for about $40 per day, but if you think you'll use the tool more than a few times, it pays to buy your own.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** Carpet cleaners are heavy: Many full-sized models weigh about 20 pounds. When shopping, consider the weight and remember that a full tank of water and/or cleaning solution can add 6 to 15 pounds. It's helpful to pick a model with a second handle for easier lifting, particularly if you need to carry it up and down stairs.

Some models come with only one tank, in which you mix water with cleaning solution, but we've found that it's more convenient to have two: one for water and a second tank for the solution. The carpet cleaner will automatically mix them in the right ratio, and you won't waste any detergent you don't use.

A carpet cleaner might come with attachments for tackling upholstery or stairs. One of the most effective accessories is an independently rotating brush for spot-cleaning stubborn stains.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't spend extra on a manufacturer's proprietary cleaning solution. Many brands recommend using their own branded detergent with their machines, but any commercial carpet cleaning product should work fine.

EXPERT TIP

"If you want to clean stairs or furniture, look for a model with a long hose to easily reach those spots."

LARRY CIUFO
Senior Test Leader for Carpet Cleaners

Bissell ProHeat 2x Revolution Pet Pro Plus 3588F $270

78
OVERALL SCORE

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				Features + Specs					
			Cleaning	Dryness	Convenience	Noise	Weight, full (lb.)	Weight, empty (lb.)	Weight, solution tank (lb.)	Hose	Separate tanks	Carrying handle
FULL-SIZED CARPET CLEANERS												
Bissell ProHeat 2x Revolution Pet Pro Plus 3588F	78	$270	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	!	27	18	9	●	●	●
Bissell ProHeat 2x Revolution Pet 35799	77	$227	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	!	26	17	9	●	●	●
Shark CarpetXpert EX201	74	$300	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	!	23	18	5	●	●	●
Bissell Revolution HydroSteam Pet 3432	73	$400	⌃	⌃	⌃	!	31	22	9	●	●	●
Tineco Carpet One Cruiser	72	$700	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	!	36	22	14	●		
Hoover PowerDash Pet Advanced FH55000	72	$160	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌄	19	14	5	●	●	
Hoover PowerDash Pet FH50700	69	$120	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌄	17	12	5		●	
Bissell TurboClean PowerBrush 2987	69	$113	!	⌃⌃	⌃	⌄⌄	18	12	6		●	
Shark CarpetXpert EX121BRN	68	$190	⌃	⌃	⌃	!	20	14	6			
Hoover SmartWash+ Automatic FH52000	68	$275	!	⌃⌃	⌃	⌄	26	18	8	●	●	●
Hoover Powerscrub XL Pet FH68002	66	$235	!	⌃⌃	⌃	⌄	29	19	10	●	●	
Hoover PowerDash Pet Advanced FH55010	66	$160	!	⌃⌃	⌃	!	19	14	5	●		

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/carpetcleaners.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on the results of all our tests. To evaluate carpet cleaners, we soil three large swatches of off-white nylon carpet with red clay. Then we run the cleaner for four wet and four dry cycles. Next, using a colorimeter, we take 60 readings of each carpet swatch per test. After 180 readings per carpet cleaner, we arrive at a **cleaning** score based on how much color is left on the carpet. This, in turn, reflects how well the carpet cleaner removed the soil. We also assess **convenience** and **noise.**

STEAM MOPS

If you have ceramic or porcelain tile floors, using a steam mop can help you clean them—without dragging around a heavy bucket of water. These all-in-one tools let you press a button to heat water inside a tank, then move the mop across the floor to steam-clean it. Some models come with detachable wands that can make it easier to clean mirrors, windows, and glass shower doors.

EXPERT TIP

"The steam from these tools can cause burns, so always use a steam mop carefully and wear closed-toe shoes."

LARRY CIUFO Senior Test Leader for Steam Mops

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** If a model doesn't produce enough steam, it won't clean very well. So look for models with high scores for both cleaning and steam rate. Choosing one with a large water tank will let you clean longer without pausing to refill.

It's also worth looking for a steam mop that has indicator lights—one to alert you when the water is fully heated and a second to show when the tank is nearly empty.

Multiple steam settings will allow you to produce more steam for tougher stains.

Not every model is a winner, of course, but we've noticed improvements in performance in the past few years. So even if you have tried one of these tools in the past and been disappointed, you might be pleasantly surprised by newer models.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't use a steam mop to clean laminate, porous tile, hardwood, or vinyl flooring, which can be damaged by extensive contact with water.

Steam & Go Housekeeper 10-in-1 SAG806D
$115

85
OVERALL SCORE

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features + Specs							
			Cleaning	Steam rate	Convenience	Weight (lb.)	Reservoir capacity (fl. oz.)	Warranty	Time to heat (sec.)	Steam levels	Cord length (ft.)	Ready light or indicator	Empty light or indicator
STEAM MOPS													
✓ **Karcher** SC 3 Upright EasyFix	95	$200	⏫	⏫	⬆	9	17.0	3	29	3	23	●	
✓ **Bissell** PowerFresh Slim 2075A	86	$165	⏫	⏸	⏸	7	14.0	2	36	2	25	●	
✓ **Euroflex** Vapour M2R	85	$230	⏫	⏸	⬇	7	20.3	5	328	1	22	●	
✓ **Steam & Go** Housekeeper 10-in-1 SAG806D	85	$115	⏫	⬇	⏸	6	10.1	1	18	Var.	20		
✓ **Bissell** Symphony 1543A	83	$215	⏫	⬇	⏫	11	14.7	2	30	1	25	●	
✓ **Tineco** Floor One S5	80	$450	⏫	⏫	⏸	16	24.0	2	23	1	27	●	●
$ **PurSteam** 10-in-1 Therma Pro 211	78	$90	⏫	⏸	⬇	6	13.0	1	19	Var.	16		
$ **Black+Decker** Classic HSM13E1	77	$50	⏫	⏸	⬇	5	13.7	2	20	1	13		
✓ **Bissell** PowerFresh Pet Lift-Off 15441	77	$145	⬆	⬆	⬆	8	14.0	2	30	2	25	●	
✓ **Hoover** WH22100	77	$85	⏫	⏸	⬆	6	21.8	1	30	Var.	20	●	
✓ **Shark** Steam & Scrub S7001	76	$180	⬆	⬆	⏸	8	11.0	1	20	3	22		
✓ **Shark** Genius Steam Pocket S5003D	75	$135	⏫	⏸	⬇	6	11.8	1	22	3	20		

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/steammops.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on the results of all our tests. To evaluate steam mops, we smear ketchup, mustard, and jam on the surface of a ceramic tile. Once the food dries, we photograph the soiled tile, then place it on a floor among similar tiles that are clean. We then take several passes at the floor with a steam mop. After **cleaning** the tile and letting it air-dry, we take another photo of the tile to identify how much soil was removed and how much remains. Under **steam levels,** "Var." indicates variable.

Kidde Smart P4010DCSCO-W (Battery) $75

93 OVERALL SCORE

SMOKE & CO ALARMS

Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors can save your life, as can combination devices that respond to both dangers. The best models in our ratings alert you to danger quickly, and many have additional features, such as the ability to pair with a security system to automatically alert the fire department when necessary.

▸ **HOW TO SHOP** Any smoke detector you buy should be capable of quickly detecting both smoldering and flaming fires, which require different kinds of sensors, and any CO detector should accurately identify high and low CO levels. CR's tests have found significant differences in how well various products can detect CO—so it's crucial to choose a model that aces that test in our ratings.

Interconnected models add a layer of safety because when one detector goes off, they all do. That's particularly useful in large, multistory homes, where a nighttime fire in the basement, for example, would trigger alarms throughout the house.

Some units also have smart home capabilities, enabling them to alert you to a problem via a phone app, even when you're away.

You'll need to decide on the power source for your smoke and CO detectors. Hardwired detectors require professional installation and come with a backup battery. Battery-powered detectors often include a 10-year sealed lithium-ion battery, though some units use replaceable batteries. You can also find models that plug into an outlet, but because smoke and CO both rise, you shouldn't use plug-in alarms on outlets that are low on the wall.

▸ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't skimp on alarm coverage. Install at least one detector of each type on every level of your home, including basements and attics, and both inside and outside bedrooms.

EXPERT TIP

"If you frequently set off your alarm while cooking, consider a multi-criteria sensor, which reduces false alarms."

LI WANG Test Leader for Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				Features + Specs			
			High CO levels	Low CO levels	Flaming fires	Smoldering fires	Power supply	Sensor types	Connectivity	Smart
COMBINATION SMOKE & CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS										
Kidde i12010SCO	97	$65	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	Hardwired	Ionization		
Kidde Smart P4010DCSCO-W (Battery)	93	$75	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	10-year battery	Photoelectric	●	
Kidde KN-COSM-IBA	92	$55	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	AA battery	Ionization		
Siterwell GS886W (Battery)	92	$70	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	AA battery	Multi-criteria optical	●	
Kidde P4010DCSCO-W (Battery)	91	$50	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	10-year battery	Photoelectric	●	
Siterwell GS886F	91	$65	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	Hardwired	Multi-criteria optical		
Meross MA301	90	$45	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	AA battery	Multi-criteria optical		
Kidde 900-CUDR (PN 21032242)	89	$45	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	AA battery	Photoelectric		
Kidde P4010ACSCO-WF	89	$90	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	Hardwired	Photoelectric	●	●
Kidde P3010K-CO	89	$55	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	10-year battery	Photoelectric		

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				Features + Specs			
			High CO levels	Low CO levels	Flaming fires	Smoldering fires	Power supply	Sensor types	Connectivity	Smart
COMBINATION SMOKE & CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS *Continued*										
✓ **Kidde** KNCOPE-D	89	$45	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	9V battery	Photoelectric		
✓ **Universal Security Instruments** AMICH3511SC	89	$58	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	10-year battery	Multi-criteria optical		
✓ **SimpliSafe** CA002-01RUS	89	$70	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	10-year battery	Photoelectric	●	

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features + Specs
			High CO levels	Low CO levels	Display/voice	Power supply
INTERCONNECTED CO DETECTORS						
✓ **First Alert** OneLink SCO501CN	93	$70	⏫	⏫	⏫	Battery
First Alert OneLink CO511B	89	$85	⏫	⏫	⏫	Battery
Kidde KN-COSM-IBA	80	$40	🔼	⏫	⏫	Hardwired
Siterwell GS828A-C	75	$40	⏫	🔼	⏫	AA battery
Kidde Silhouette KN-COPF-I	75	$55	🔼	🔼	🔼	Hardwired
STAND-ALONE CO DETECTORS						
✓ **First Alert** CO615	91	$30	⏫	⏫	🔼	Plug-in
$ **Kidde** C3010-D	85	$45	🔼	⏫	⏫	10-year battery
✓ **Kidde** Smart KN-COP-DP-10YL-AQ-WF	84	$80	🔼	⏫	⏫	Plug-in
$ **Kidde** KN-COB-BLP	84	$20	🔼	⏫		AA battery
First Alert CO410	80	$30	🔼	⏫	⏫	Battery
Kidde KN-COB-DP2	78	$29	🔼	⏫		Plug-in
Kidde Nighthawk KN-COPP-3	77	$49	⏫	🔼	❗	Plug-in
X-Sense CD01	74	$35	⏫	🔼	❗	10-year battery
Universal Security Instruments MCD305SB	73	$40	❗	⏫	⏫	10-year battery
X-Sense CO03D	72	$30	⏫	🔼	❗	AA battery
X-Sense CD07	72	$35	⏫	🔼	❗	10-year battery
Kidde Nighthawk KN-COB-B-LP	70	$35	🔼	⏫		Battery

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results		Features + Specs
			Flaming fires	Smoldering fires	Power supply
SMOKE DETECTORS					
✓ **Kidde** RF-SM-DC	99	$41	⏫	⏫	AA battery
✓ **Kidde** 20SA10	98	$38	⏫	⏫	Hardwired
✓ **Kidde** PI2010	97	$35	⏫	⏫	Hardwired
✓ **First Alert** 3120B	96	$35	⏫	⏫	Hardwired
✓ **Universal Security Instruments** MI106S	96	$23	⏫	⏫	Hardwired
$ **Siterwell** GS517	96	$17	⏫	⏫	Hardwired
✓ **Kidde** 20SD10-V	96	$40	⏫	⏫	10-year battery
✓ **Kidde** 20SD10	95	$31	⏫	⏫	10-year battery
✓ **Kidde** i12040	95	$23	⏫	⏫	Hardwired
$ **First Alert** SMI100	94	$18	⏫	⏫	9V battery
✓ **SimpliSafe** SSSD3	93	$35	⏫	⏫	CR123A battery
$ **Kidde** i9080	93	$15	⏫	⏫	9V battery
$ **Kidde** i9060	93	$14	⏫	⏫	9V battery
$ **Siterwell** GS526A	92	$15	⏫	⏫	10-year battery
✓ **2Gig** 2GIG-SMKT8-345	92	$112	⏫	⏫	CR123A battery
$ **Kidde** i9070	91	$17	⏫	⏫	9V battery
✓ **Kidde** P9050	91	$20	⏫	⏫	9V battery
$ **Kidde** i9050	90	$15	⏫	⏫	9V battery
✓ **Kidde** i12060	87	$20	⏫	⏫	Hardwired
Kidde Micro i1040	77	$18	⏫	🔼	10-year battery

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on performance ratings in a number of tests. For smoke detectors, this includes the detector's response time to both **flaming** and **smoldering fires.** For CO monitors, this includes the monitor's response to both **high** and **low CO levels,** as well as the accuracy of the CO level reported by the monitor on its display or through a voice message. Combined smoke and CO monitors incorporate their performance ratings across both sets of tests.

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/smoke-co-detectors.

INTERIOR PAINTS

Your home's surfaces deal with a lot, from scratches and spills in the living room to humidity and grease in the kitchen. A fresh coat of paint can typically cover any imperfections, and a great product can help prevent future blemishes. The best paints in our ratings go on smoothly, stand up to stains, and are easy to wipe clean.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** Our ratings can help you pick a high-quality formula, but you'll also need to choose the best sheen, or finish.

Matte or flat paints excel at hiding chips and scratches, but they can't handle cleaning as well as glossier finishes can. They are typically used for ceilings, living rooms, and kid-free bedroom walls. An eggshell finish, which you can scrub lightly, is ideal for family rooms, living rooms, bedrooms, and hallways that could use a smidge of sheen. Satin is a good fit for kitchens, children's bedrooms, and bathrooms. Semi-gloss is ideal for trim, windows, and doors.

You can look for the Greenguard Gold certification to choose a paint that emits lower levels of harmful volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't fail to plan for future touch-ups. Make sure to save at least a few ounces of each color to touch up blemishes, chips, or marks. (However, keep in mind that after a few years, that extra paint may not match your walls exactly.)

EXPERT TIP

"Skip oil-based paints, which CR doesn't test. They're durable, but oil-based interior paints can release higher levels of harmful fumes."

LILLY CARRERA
Test Technician
for Interior Paints

HGTV Home by Sherwin-Williams Showcase (Lowe's)
$52

92
OVERALL SCORE

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results		Features + Specs	
			Hiding	Staining	Self-priming	Claims zero VOCs
INTERIOR PAINTS						
Behr Dynasty (Home Depot)	96	$63	⏫	⏫	●	
Behr Marquee (Home Depot)	95	$56	⏫	⏫	●	
Behr Ultra (Home Depot)	93	$46	⏫	⏫	●	
HGTV Home by Sherwin-Williams Showcase (Lowe's)	92	$52	⏫	⏫	●	
Valspar Reserve	92	$55	⏫	⏫	●	
Magnolia Home by Joanna Gaines Premium Interior	89	$62	⏫	⏫	●	
Behr Premium Plus (Home Depot)	86	$39	⏫	🔼	●	●
Valspar Ultra Interior (Lowe's)	81	$46	🔼	⏫	●	
HGTV Home by Sherwin-Williams Infinity (Lowe's)	80	$66	🔼	⏫	●	
Benjamin Moore Aura	74	$99	⏫	❗	●	
HGTV Home by Sherwin-Williams Ovation Plus (Lowe's)	70	$43	🔼	⏫	●	
Valspar Signature (Lowe's)	63	$46	⏫	🔽	●	
Clark+Kensington Enamel (Ace)	63	$44	⏫	🔽	●	
Glidden Diamond (Home Depot)	62	$36	🔼	🔽	●	●

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/paints.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines test results from our hiding and staining evaluations. Because a brand's matte/flat, eggshell, satin, and semi-gloss formulations perform similarly overall, we use satin for testing or eggshell if satin isn't available. **Hiding** determines how well a coat of paint will cover a dark-painted wall once dried. **Staining** assesses how well a paint resists tough oil- and water-based stains, and how easily those wipe clean.

EXTERIOR PAINTS

An exterior paint job is no small undertaking. Even if you're keeping the same color, plan on the project taking a week or longer. When choosing a product, remember that exterior paint has to work far harder than interior paint, resisting years of sun and rain exposure. Making the right choice can improve the look of your home—and help protect the siding and trim, too.

EXPERT TIP

"If you love a color from a brand that doesn't do well in our ratings, just ask your paint store to match it in the formula of your choice."

LI WANG Test Leader for Exterior Paints

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** Start by choosing a high-scoring paint from our ratings. Note that if you're hiring a pro, they may have their own preferences.

Let your home's location help dictate which paint you buy. Warm regions with high sun exposure may require UV- and mildew-resistant acrylic-based formulas, while cold areas could require "cold set" or "low temperature" formula, which will be labeled accordingly.

Next, consider the finish. Flat finishes can camouflage flaws, while eggshell or satin looks best on smoother surfaces. Highlight trim with semi-gloss or gloss finishes. For homes built before 1978, have an expert determine whether any lead paint is present. Even if the house has been painted multiple times, lead might be released during sanding.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't scrimp on exterior paint. You might save a few hundred dollars now, only to end up spending more on repainting in a few years.

$ Behr Marquee Exterior (Home Depot)
$54

75
OVERALL SCORE

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results: Appearance after 3 years	Test Results: Appearance after 6 years	Test Results: Appearance after 9 years	Features + Specs: VOCs (grams/liter)	Features + Specs: Resists cracking	Features + Specs: Resists color change	Features + Specs: Resists dirt	Features + Specs: Resists mildew
EXTERIOR PAINTS (COMPLETED THE EQUIVALENT OF 9 YEARS' EXPOSURE)										
$ **Behr** Marquee Exterior (Home Depot)	75	$54	⏫	⬆	⬆	50	●	●	●	●
$ **Valspar** DuraMax Exterior (Lowe's)	72	$37	⏫	⬆	⬆	50	●	●		●
$ **Behr** Ultra Exterior (Home Depot)	69	$42	⏫	⬆	●	50	●	●		●
Benjamin Moore Regal Select Exterior	68	$83	⏫	⬆	⬆	50	●	●		●
Sherwin-Williams Duration Exterior	64	$94	⬆	⬆	●	50	●			●
Glidden One Coat Exterior	63	$42	⬆	⬆	●	50	●	●		
Clark+Kensington Exterior (Ace)	62	$47	⬆	⬆	●	50	●	●	●	
Sherwin-Williams Emerald Exterior	61	$72	⬆	⬆	●	50	●			
Benjamin Moore Aura Exterior	61	$68	⬆	⬆	●	50	●			●
Behr Premium Plus Exterior (Home Depot)	60	$31	⏫	⬆	●	50	●			●
Glidden Premium Exterior (Home Depot)	42	$31	⬆	●	⬇	50	●	●		

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on the results of all our tests. CR's test engineers test exterior paints similarly to deck stains (see page 84). They paint pine panels and place them on the roof of our headquarters in Yonkers, N.Y., where they sit for three years. Panel boards are positioned to face south and are tilted to intensify the effects of sun and weather. One year of CR's testing is equivalent to about three years in real time. The results give a sense of how paints will look after nine years on a house.

WOOD STAINS

Wood stain adds a layer of beauty and protection to decks, fences, and exterior doors. Although staining wood is a perfectly doable DIY project, that doesn't mean you want to deal with it more often than necessary. The right type of wood stain will keep the results looking good for years.

▸ **HOW TO SHOP** Solid stains typically hold up longer than other kinds of stain—three to five years—but they also hide the grain of the wood the way paint does. That's not ideal if you've chosen a decking material partly for the natural appearance of the wood. Also, after a few coats, solid stains can build up a film, which can peel, chip, and crack like paint.

Semi-transparent stains color the wood but let the grain peek through, making them a good choice for wood that you want to show off. Some brands also offer what they label semi-solid and/or transparent stains. These give the material more protection without completely hiding its grain.

Semi-transparent stains aren't as tough as the top solid options and will probably last only two to three years on a deck.

Clear sealers have little or no pigment—instead they accentuate the natural beauty of the wood. They do contain water repellents. However, the boards aren't protected from ultraviolet rays and will tend to turn gray over time. Going with this option means you'll probably have to restain your deck annually.

▸ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't apply stain to pressure-treated wood too soon after building a deck or fence. The lumber is ready to stain weeks or months after construction, when the surface is dry enough to absorb a few drops of water.

✔ **Behr Premium Solid Color Waterproofing Stain & Sealer (Home Depot)** $50

82 OVERALL SCORE

EXPERT TIP

"When applying stain, work quickly and try to apply it evenly. If the stain pools and dries in a single spot, it will be hard to even out the finish later."

LI WANG Test Leader for Exterior Stains

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features + Specs				
			Appearance after 1 year	Appearance after 2 years	Appearance after 3 years	VOCs (grams/liter)	Resists cracking	Resists color change	Resists dirt	Resists mildew
SOLID WOOD STAINS										
✔ **Behr** Premium Solid Color Waterproofing Stain & Sealer (Home Depot)	82	$50	⏫	⏫	⬆	100	●	●	●	●
✔ **Valspar** One-Coat Solid (Lowe's)	71	$43	⏫	⬆	⬆	100	●	●	●	●
Cabot Solid Color Acrylic Siding Stain	68	$49	⏫	⏫	❗	100	●	●	●	
PPG ProLuxe Premium Solid Wood Finish	68	$69	⏫	⬆	⬆	250	●	●		●
Behr Deckplus Solid Color Waterproofing Wood Stain (Home Depot)	66	$40	⏫	⏫	❗	100	●	●		●
Sherwin-Williams Woodscapes Solid	57	$79	⏫	❗	❗	136	●	●		

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features + Specs				
			Appearance after 1 year	Appearance after 2 years	Appearance after 3 years	VOCs (grams/liter)	Resists cracking	Resists color change	Resists dirt	Resists mildew
SOLID WOOD STAINS *Continued*										
Sherwin-Williams SuperDeck Exterior Waterborne Solid Color Deck	37	$55	▲	●	▼	100				
Olympic Maximum Solid	33	$44	▲	●	▼▼	100				
SEMI-TRANSPARENT WOOD STAINS										
Olympic Elite Advanced Stain + Sealant in One Semi-Transparent	41	$50	▲	▼		100				●
Ace Wood Royal Semi-Transparent Deck & Siding	35	$50	▲	▼		100				●
PPG ProLuxe SRD Semi-Transparent Wood Finish	33	$75	▲	▼▼		100				●
Behr Premium Semi-Transparent Waterproofing Stain & Sealer (Home Depot)	31	$49	▲	▼▼		100	●	●	●	●
Sherwin-Williams Woodscapes Semi-Transparent	21	$79	▼	▼▼		79				
Valspar One-Coat Semi-Transparent (Lowe's)	12	$41	▼	▼▼		100				
Sherwin-Williams SuperDeck Exterior Waterborne Semi-Transparent	12	$67	▼	▼▼		50				
Olympic Maximum Semi-Transparent	10	$43	▼▼	▼▼		100				●
Cabot Semi-Transparent Deck & Siding	8	$54	▼	▼▼		250				
Behr Deckplus Semi-Transparent Waterproofing Wood Stain (Home Depot)	8	$40	▼▼	▼▼		100				●
CLEAR SEALER WOOD STAINS										
✓ **Behr** Premium Transparent Waterproofing Wood Finish (Home Depot)	27	$46	▼			275				●
✓ **Olympic** Wood Protector Waterproofing Sealant	17	$25	▼			78				●
Cabot Clear Wood Protector	9	$36	▼▼			50				
Olympic Maximum Sealant	5	$40	▼▼			100				●
Valspar One-Coat Clear (Lowe's)	5	$28	▼▼			100				
Olympic WaterGuard for Wood	5	$30	▼▼			79				●
Sherwin-Williams SuperDeck Clear Sealer	4	$65	▼▼			100				
Thompson's WaterSeal Clear Wood Sealer	4	$20	▼▼			100				

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on the results of all our tests. To rate deck stains, we apply two coats to pine boards, then place them on the roof of our headquarters in Yonkers, N.Y. The boards are faced south and angled down to intensify the effects of the sun and weather. We take note of the boards' condition after one, two, and three years. Each year of testing is equivalent to a year on your deck or about three years on siding or a fence.

PRESSURE WASHERS

A pressure washer (or power washer) is like a magic wand for erasing stains on decking, walkways, patios, and steps. With a brief blast, you can erase months or even years of stubborn buildup, including spilled food, mud, and long-decomposed leaves.

▸ **HOW TO SHOP** Your first decision will be whether to buy a gas-powered, corded electric, or battery-powered machine. All three types direct water under pressure through interchangeable nozzles—the smaller the angle of the nozzle you use, the more intense the stream will be.

Gas pressure washers are the most powerful, so you can quickly clean large areas such as decks, siding, and driveways. But they can be somewhat noisy and heavy. They require periodic tuneups and need the most winter maintenance. More power also means that you're more likely to gouge or splinter wooden surfaces or chip paint.

Corded electric models work well for small decks and patios, outdoor furniture, and other limited jobs that require basic cleaning, not concentrated stain removal. They're relatively light and quiet, require little upkeep, and create no exhaust. But the lower water pressure makes for longer cleaning times, and your cleaning area is limited to the length of the cord and hose.

Battery-powered pressure washers offer a slightly amped-up alternative to cleaning with a regular garden hose. Most don't produce a ton of pressure, and CR currently recommends only two battery-powered models.

▸ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't splurge on a giant gas pressure washer if you don't really need one. Consider renting a heavy-duty machine for deep-cleaning and buying a lighter-duty electric model for maintenance.

Westinghouse WPX3400
$334

77
OVERALL SCORE

EXPERT TIP

"Never use a zero-degree nozzle on a pressure washer. It's dangerous—and unnecessary. You can get the same results with some patience and a 15-degree tip."

DAVE TREZZA Senior Test Leader for Pressure Washers

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results				Features + Specs								
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Cleaning	Power	Noise	Ease of use	Wheels	Soap/ detergent dispenser	Weight (lb.)	Pressure range (psi)	Flow rate (gpm)	Cord length (ft.)	Hose (ft.)	Warranty (yr.)	Soap nozzle
GAS-POWERED PRESSURE WASHERS																	
Westinghouse WPX3400	77	$334	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔽	⏫	Solid	Injection line	66.6	3,400	2.6	NA	25	3	●
Westinghouse WPX3200	73	$329	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏬	⏫	Solid	Soap tank	66.4	3,200	2.5	NA	28	3	●
Westinghouse WPX2700	72	$250	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔽	🔼	Solid	Soap tank	62.6	2,700	2.3	NA	25	3	●
Ryobi RY802925VNM	72	$350	❗	❗	⏫	🔼	🔽	🔼	Solid	Injection line	58.65	2,900	2.5	NA	25	3	●
Echo PW-3100	70	$600	–	–	⏫	🔼	🔽	🔼	Solid	Injection line	76.05	3,100	2.5	NA	25	2	●
Generac 8874	70	$380	❗	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔽	⏫	Solid	Injection line	63.3	2,900	2.4	NA	25	2	●
Simpson MS60773-S	69	$360	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔽	🔼	Solid	Injection line	52.7	2,800	2.3	NA	27.5	2	●
Generac 7899	69	$419	❗	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔽	🔼	Solid	Soap tank	61.0	2,900	2.4	NA	28.5	3	●
A-iPower PWF2800KH	69	$340	–	–	⏫	🔼	🔽	🔼	Solid	Injection line	57.1	2,800	2.4	NA	25	2	●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results				Features + Specs								
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Cleaning	Power	Noise	Ease of use	Wheels	Soap/ detergent dispenser	Weight (lb.)	Pressure range (psi)	Flow rate (gpm)	Cord length (ft.)	Hose (ft.)	Warranty (yr.)	Soap nozzle
GAS-POWERED PRESSURE WASHERS *Continued*																	
Simpson MS60805-S	68	$430	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▼	▲	Solid	Soap tank	52.6	3,000	2.4	NA	25	2	●
Simpson CM61227	68	$410	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▼	▲	Pneumatic	Injection line	62.95	3,100	2.3	NA	25	1	●
Generac G0088960	68	$400	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▼	▲	Solid	Injection line	62.25	3,000	2.4	NA	25	2	●
DeWalt DXPW3123	68	$450	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▼	▲	Solid	Injection line	55.5	3,100	2.3	NA	35.5	2	●
Stihl RB 200	67	$650	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▼	▲	Solid	Injection line	65.4	2,500	2.3	NA	25	2	●
DeWalt DXPW61336	67	$479	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▼	▲	Solid	Injection line	54.5	3,100	2.3	NA	35	2	●
BATTERY-POWERED PRESSURE WASHERS																	
✓ **Ego** HPW3204-2	74	$799	—	—	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	Solid	Wand bottle	50.0	3,200	1.2	NA	26.5	5	●
✓ **Greenworks** PW60L540	73	$700	—	—	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	Solid	Injection line	49.2	3,000	2.0	NA	25	4	●
Craftsman CMCPW1500N2	61	$550	—	—	▲	▼	●	▲▲	Solid	Wand bottle	24.7	1,500	1.2	NA	25.5	3	●
Ryobi RY40306BTLVNM	61	$500	▲	●	●	▼	▲	▲▲	Solid	Injection line	34.0	2,000	1.2	NA	24.5	3	●
ELECTRIC-POWERED 120V PRESSURE WASHERS																	
$ **Greenworks** PW18HYB	70	$200	▲▲	●	▲	●	▲	▲▲	Solid	Injection line	27.5	1,800	1.1	35	25	3	●
✓ **Greenworks** GPW2301	70	$360	▲▲	●	▲	▼	▲	▲▲	Solid	Soap tank	38.1	2,300	2.3	35	25	3	●
✓ **Greenworks** GPW3001	70	$430	▲▲	●	▲	●	▲	▲▲	Solid	Soap tank	48.5	3,000	1.1	35	25	3	●
✓ **Bauer** 57656	68	$250	▲▲	●	●	●	●	▲▲	Solid	Soap tank	47.4	2,300	1.2	35	26	3	●
✓ **Greenworks** GPW2700	67	$430	▲▲	●	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	Solid	Soap tank	46.4	2,700	1.2	35	25	3	●
✓ **Stihl** RE 90	67	$200	▲	▲▲	●	●	▲	▲▲	Solid	Wand bottle	22.0	2,100	1.2	35	23	2	
✓ **Stihl** RE 110 Plus	66	$350	▲	▲▲	●	●	▲	▲▲	Solid	Wand bottle	41.8	2,170	1.2	35	22	2	●
✓ **DeWalt** DWPW2400	66	$329	▲	●	▲	●	▲	▲▲	Pneumatic	Soap tank	49.0	2,400	1.1	35	26	3	●
$ **Black+Decker** BEPW1850	66	$149	▲	▼▼	▲	●	●	▲	Solid	Injection line	19.6	1,850	1.2	35	27	2	
✓ **DeWalt** DWPW2100	65	$300	▲	●	▲	●	▲	▲▲	Solid	Soap tank	23.0	2,100	2.0	35	28	3	●
✓ **Worx** WG607	64	$260	▲	●	▲	▼	▲	▲▲	Solid	Injection line	42.35	2,000	1.2	35	25	3	●
✓ **Stihl** RE 80	62	$150	▲	▲▲	●	▼	▲	▲▲	Solid	Wand bottle	17.2	1,600	1.2	35	17	3	●
✓ **Simpson** CM60976-S	62	$297	—	—	●	●	▲	▲	Solid	Injection line	50.6	2,300	1.2	35	25	1	●
Bauer 56877	67	$200	▲▲	●	▲	▼	▲	▲▲	Solid	Soap tank	31.2	2,000	1.3	35	25	3	●
Sun Joe SPX4600	66	$310	▲	●	▲▲	●	●	▲▲	Solid	Injection line	45.35	3,000	1.3	35	25	2	●
Westinghouse WPX3200e	64	$349	—	—	●	●	●	▲▲	Solid	Injection line	33.1	3,200	1.76	35	26	3	●
Karcher 1.106-222.0	63	$350	▼	▼	▲	●	▲	▲▲	Solid	Injection line	45.35	2,300	1.2	35	25	2	●

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at **CR.org/pressurewashers**.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on our test results and survey data. **Predicted reliability** is the likelihood that a model of a given brand will develop issues within three years of purchase, according to member surveys. **Owner satisfaction** is the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend the model to others. A gray dash (—) indicates insufficient data for brand-level rating. To rate pressure washers, we measure which models produce a higher psi (pounds per square inch). Then we time how long models take to strip paint from painted plastic panels. We also measure **noise** and evaluate **ease of use.**

LAWN MOWERS

Lawn mowers range from $250 push mowers to riding machines that cost thousands of dollars. In recent years, battery-powered machines have become very popular. They require minimal maintenance and tend to be quieter and lighter than gas models. But you have to consider how long they'll run on a single charge.

▸ **HOW TO SHOP** For smaller yards—under half an acre—a walk-behind mower is your best bet. There are two types: push mowers, which tend to cost less, and self-propelled mowers, which you simply have to steer. You'll find gas and battery-powered models in both styles. Many battery mowers can run for about an hour—covering about a quarter acre of lawn—on a single charge.

For yards of more than a half acre, a lawn tractor or zero-turn-radius mower may make more sense. Gas riding mowers are a great option for the largest lawns because they're designed to run for hours.

If you have an irregularly shaped space or lots of trees to maneuver around, a zero-turn mower can offer more nimble handling than a riding mower. Rather than a steering wheel, you control a zero-turn with a pair of levers, which may require a bit of practice.

▸ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't buy a push mower for a large or hilly yard. Self-propelled mowers are typically more expensive, but they're easier to maneuver, particularly on sloped parts of your property.

EXPERT TIP

"Battery technology has really improved. When you're shopping for a walk-behind mower, check for high scores in our run-time test to be sure it has the power to cut your entire lawn on a single charge."

DAVE TREZZA Test Leader for Lawn Mowers

Ego LM2123SP-2
$700

84
OVERALL SCORE

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results									Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Side discharging	Mulching	Bagging	Evenness	Handling	Run time	Charge time	Noise at ear	Noise at 25 ft.	Deck size (in.)	Volts (V DC)	Battery platform voltage (V)	Battery capacity (Ah)	Mower warranty (yr.)	Battery warranty (yr.)	Swing-up handlebar	High wheels
BATTERY PUSH MOWERS																					
Ryobi RY401220	82	$750	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	21	40	40	12	5	3	●	●
Stihl RMA 510	82	$600	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	21	36	36	7.2	3	3	●	
Ego LM2114	79	$449	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	21	56	56	6	5	3	●	
BATTERY SELF-PROPELLED MOWERS																					
Greenworks MO80L421	86	$750	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	21	80	80	8	4	4	●	●
Ego LM2123SP-2	84	$700	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	21	56	56	6	5	3	●	
Ryobi RYPM8010	83	$2,000	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	30	80	80	10	5	5	●	●
Ryobi RY401210US	83	$800	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	21	40	40	12	5	3	●	●
Ego LM2236SP	83	$900	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	22	56	56	10	5	5	●	

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results							Features + Specs									
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Side discharging	Mulching	Bagging	Evenness	Handling	Noise at ear	Noise at 25 ft.	Deck size (in.)	Engine size (cc)	Engine torque	Mower warranty (yr.)	Blade-brake clutch	Washout port	Swing-up handlebar	Upright storage	High wheels	Optional discharge chute
GAS PUSH MOWERS																					
Ariens Razor 911607	72	$400	–	–	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▼	!	21	150	6.25	3		●	●	●		
Toro 21311	72	$369	▲▲	!	▲▲	▲▲	!	▲▲	▲	!	!	21	140	5.5	2						●
Troy-Bilt TB120C	71	$360	▲▲	!	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	!	▼	!	21	163	NS	2						
Yardmax YG1650	70	$273	–	–	▲▲	▲▲	!	▲	▲▲	▼	▼	21	170	8.8	2			●		●	
GAS SELF-PROPELLED MOWERS																					
Honda HRN216VKA	83	$550	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	!	▲	21	166	NS	3			●			
Toro Super Recycler 21565	73	$800	!	▲	▲▲	▲▲	!	▲▲	▲▲	▼	!	21	163	7.25	5			●	●	●	●
Toro Personal Pace Recycler 21465	73	$460	!	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▼	!	22	150	6.25	2			●	●	●	
Toro Recycler Max 21485	72	$550	!	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▼	▼	22	163	NS	5			●	●		●
Troy-Bilt TB310B XP	72	$525	!	!	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▼	▼	21	163	NS	3		●				
DeWalt DW12AVP2R3739	72	$500	!	!	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▼	!	21	163	7.25	3					●	
Toro Recycler 21462	71	$479	!	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▼	▼	22	163	7.25	2					●	●
Toro 21219	71	$1,600	!	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	!	▼▼	▼▼	30	223	10	3	●	●	●			

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results							Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Side discharging	Mulching	Bagging	Evenness	Handling	Noise at ear	Noise at 25 ft.	Drive type	Deck size (in.)	Engine power (hp)	Warranty (yr.)	Cuts in reverse	Cruise control	Washout port
LAWN TRACTORS																		
John Deere X354	84	$5,000	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▼▼	▼▼	Hydrostatic	42	21.5	4	●	●	●
John Deere S240-48	84	$3,700	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▼	▼	Hydrostatic	48	18.5	3	●	●	●
John Deere X350-42	83	$4,000	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▼▼	▼▼	Hydrostatic	42	18.5	4	●	●	●
Cub Cadet XT2 SLX50	81	$3,800	!	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▼▼	▼▼	Hydrostatic	50	NS	3	●	●	●
John Deere S170	81	$3,300	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▼▼	▼▼	Hydrostatic	48	24.0	2	●	●	●
John Deere S120	80	$2,700	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▼▼	▼▼	Hydrostatic	42	22.0	2	●	●	●
John Deere S140	80	$2,900	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▼▼	▼▼	Hydrostatic	48	22.0	2	●		●
John Deere S220	80	$3,000	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▼▼	▼▼	Hydrostatic	42	22.0	3	●	●	●

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at **CR.org/mowers**.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on performance ratings, along with survey data for **predicted reliability** (which estimates the likelihood that newly purchased models will develop problems or break within the first five years of ownership) and **owner satisfaction** (the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend their lawn mower). A gray dash (–) indicates insufficient data for brand-level rating. We test each mower using three modes: **side discharging, mulching,** and **bagging.** We cut both level turf and slopes, and review any convenience features.

EXPERT TIP

"String trimmers can be heavy. Look for one that comes with a shoulder strap, which can take a lot of the weight off of you."

DAVE TREZZA Senior Test Leader for String Trimmers

STRING TRIMMERS

String trimmers are the tool of choice for cutting high grass around the edges of your yard, like along fences, rock walls, and garden beds. They can also tackle tall grass and weeds that might bog down a lawn mower, and they can clear a path through light brush.

▸ **HOW TO SHOP** String trimmers can be powered by gasoline, a battery, or a power cord. The choice depends largely on the size and layout of your yard.

In the past, if you had a very large yard (more than a half acre) or needed to cut through lots of dense brush, your best bet was a gas-powered trimmer. Those machines are still a good option. But battery trimmers have improved tremendously in recent years. They now perform just as well as gas models and are limited only by run time and charge time.

String trimmers have either curved shafts or straight shafts. Curved-shaft models can be easier to maneuver, while those with straight shafts have a longer reach. You can try handling both designs at a store to see which you prefer.

Finally, it's best to wear goggles, hearing protection, and closed-toe shoes when using these tools.

▸ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't buy a battery-powered string trimmer without considering what other tools you may want later. If you stick to one brand, you may be able to use the same batteries in multiple products.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results					Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Trimming	Edging	Tall grass and weeds	Handling	Ease of use	Shaft	Weight (lb.)	Engine size	Line diameter (in.)	Voltage	Battery platform voltage (V)	Four-cycle engine	Dual line
GAS STRAIGHT-SHAFT STRING TRIMMERS																	
✓ **Honda** HHT35SLTA	86	$450	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	16.1	36.0 cc	0.095-0.105	NA	NA	●	●
✓ **Echo** SRM-2620	84	$370	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	12.1	25.4 cc	0.095	NA	NA		●
✓ **Echo** SRM-225i	83	$260	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	12.1	21.2 cc	0.095	NA	NA		●
✓ **Stihl** FS 70 R	83	$300	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	12.7	27.0 cc	0.095	NA	NA		●
$ **Stihl** FS 56 RC-E	81	$200	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	13.0	27.0 cc	0.095	NA	NA		●
✓ **Husqvarna** 130L	81	$250	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	12.9	28.0 cc	0.08-0.105	NA	NA		●
Husqvarna 330LK	78	$300	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	13.4	28.0 cc	0.08	NA	NA		●
Echo SRM-266	77	$350	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	13.2	25.4 cc	0.095	NA	NA		●
GAS CURVED-SHAFT STRING TRIMMERS																	
✓ **Husqvarna** 130C	77	$220	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	!	▲	Curved	11.8	28.0 cc	0.079-0.095	NA	NA		●
$ **Stihl** FS 40 C-E	75	$120	!	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Curved	11.2	27.0 cc	0.08 or 0.095	NA	NA		●
✓ **Echo** GT-225L	75	$240	▲	!	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Curved	11.6	21.2 cc	0.08	NA	NA		●
$ **Troy-Bilt** TB25C	69	$124	▼	▼▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	!	▲	Curved	10.0	25.0 cc	0.095	NA	NA		●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results					Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Trimming	Edging	Tall grass and weeds	Handling	Ease of use	Shaft	Weight (lb.)	Engine size	Line diameter (in.)	Voltage	Battery platform voltage (V)	Four-cycle engine	Dual line
ELECTRIC CORDED STRING TRIMMERS																	
Ryobi RY41135	80	$75	▲	▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	10.0	10 amp	0.08	NA	NA	NA	●
Black+Decker BESTE620	72	$95	●	▼▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	Straight	5.0	6.5 amp	0.065	NA	NA	NA	
BATTERY STRING TRIMMERS																	
Makita XRU15PT	91	$450	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	10.1	NA	0.08-0.09	36	18	NA	●
Ego ST1502SA	90	$189	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	10.2	NA	0.095	56	56	NA	●
Makita XRU23SM1	89	$249	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	7.3	NA	0.08	18	18	NA	●
Makita GRU01M1	89	$499	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	10.6	NA	0.09	40	40	NA	●
Ego ST1623T	88	$299	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	Straight	12.6	NA	0.095	56	56	NA	●
Milwaukee 2828-21	88	$200	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	11.5	NA	0.08 or 0.095	18	18	NA	●
Ego MST1603	87	$349	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	14.6	NA	0.095	56	56	NA	●
Milwaukee 2825-21ST	87	$300	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	12.4	NA	0.08-0.095	18	18	NA	●
Kobalt (Lowe's) KST 2580-06	87	$250	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	10.8	NA	0.08 or 0.095	80	80	NA	●
Worx WG185	86	$250	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	9.4	NA	0.095	40	40	NA	●
Hart HLST051VNM	86	$250	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	11.1	NA	0.095	40	40	NA	●
Makita XUX02SM1X1	86	$319	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	Straight	10.4	NA	0.08	18	18	NA	●
Ego ST1521S	86	$249	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	9.9	NA	0.095	56	56	NA	●
Worx WG186	86	$350	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	12	NA	0.095	40	20	NA	●
Skil LT4818-10	86	$160	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	Straight	9.4	NA	0.08	40	40	NA	●
Cub Cadet ST15E	86	$230	—	—	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	10.3	NA	0.08 or 0.095	60	60	NA	●
Stihl FSA 57	85	$200	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	7.5	NA	0.065 or 0.08	36	36	NA	●
Ego ST1511T	85	$200	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	10.6	NA	0.095	56	56	NA	●
Ryobi RY40270VNM	85	$200	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	11.7	NA	0.08 or 0.095	40	40	NA	●
Skil LT4832C-11	84	$160	▲▲	●	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	9.3	NA	0.08	40	40	NA	●
Greenworks ST48L4411	84	$230	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	10.5	NA	0.08	48	24	NA	●
Skil LT4823B-10	84	$130	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	7.2	NA	0.08	20	20	NA	●
Ryobi RY402110VNM	84	$329	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	13	NA	0.105	40	40	NA	●
Toro 51830	84	$219	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	10.1	NA	0.08 or 0.095	60	60	NA	●
Ryobi RY40290VNM	84	$259	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	Straight	11	NA	0.095	40	40	NA	●
Greenworks ST60L254	84	$200	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	11	NA	0.08	60	60	NA	●
DeWalt DCST922BWCB240C	84	$350	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Straight	8.6	NA	0.08	20	20	NA	●

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/stringtrimmers.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on test results and survey data. **Predicted reliability** is how likely a model of a given brand will develop issues within four years of purchase, according to member surveys. **Owner satisfaction** is the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend the model to others. A gray dash (—) indicates insufficient data for brand-level rating. To evaluate string trimmers, we tackle typical yard weeds and high grass, as well as dense brush. We time how long each model takes to clear a defined path and test each model's ability to create a neat, straight line along a walkway. We also test for **ease of use.**

LEAF BLOWERS

Leaf blowers can make quick work of gathering up leaves in the fall. But they are also useful tools for clearing dusty decks in summer and light snow in winter, not to mention sprucing up walkways and porches at any time of year.

✓ **Cat DG651**
$363

90 OVERALL SCORE

▸ **HOW TO SHOP** Leaf blowers come in three styles: handheld, backpack, and wheeled. The choice comes down mainly to the nature of your yard.

Handheld models are best for small properties with only a few leafy trees, while backpack leaf blowers work well for larger lots. Wheeled leaf blowers are useful for very large yards but are hard to maneuver on slopes and around trees. (See ratings for wheeled models at **CR.org/leafblowers**.)

You also need to consider the power source. Corded blowers tend to be inexpensive and may be all you need if you have a small yard (and a convenient outdoor outlet). Battery models give you more range. They start easily and run more quietly than gas machines, but run times vary—a battery might die before the job is done.

Whichever type of leaf blower you choose, remember to wear goggles and a dust mask; they'll protect you from fine particulates, especially in dusty, dry conditions. And wear hearing protection for any model that doesn't ace our noise-at-ear tests.

EXPERT TIP

"If you choose a battery-powered leaf blower, consider buying a second battery. Run times on leaf blowers aren't as long as for some other battery tools."

COURTNEY PENNICOOKE Market Analyst for Leaf Blowers

▸ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't fail to consider how much each model weighs. The heaviest handheld blowers in our ratings can tip the scales at three times as much as the lightest models, making them much harder to use for a prolonged cleanup session.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features + Specs								
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Sweeping	Loosening	Vacuuming	Handling and ease of use	Noise at 50 ft.	Noise at ear	Weight (lb.)	Engine size/ motor power	Warranty (yr.)	Voltage	Multiple speeds	Vacuum capability	Translucent fuel tank	Spring assisted starting	Four-cycle engine
GASOLINE HANDHELD BLOWERS																			
✓ **Senix** BLV4QL-M	79	$200	–	–	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌄	⌄	9.8	31.0 cc	3	NA	●	●	●	●	●
✓ **Stihl** BG 86 C-E	79	$290	!	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃		⌃	!	⌄	10.4	27.0 cc	2	NA	●		●		
✓ **Echo** PB-2520	76	$200	!	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃		!	!	⌄	9.6	25.4 cc	5	NA	●		●	●	
✓ **Echo** PB-2620	75	$279	!	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃		!	!	⌄	10.6	25.4 cc	5	NA	●		●		
BATTERY HANDHELD BLOWERS																			
✓ **Cat** DG651	90	$363	–	–	⌃⌃	⌃⌃		⌃	⌃⌃	!	11.0	NA	5	60	●		NA	NA	NA
✓ **Ego** LB7654	89	$299	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃		⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌄	9.9	NA	5	56	●		NA	NA	NA
✓ **Ryobi** RY404100VNM	88	$329	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃		⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	9.5	NA	5	40	●		NA	NA	NA
✓ **Atlas** 56999	87	$280	–	–	⌃⌃	⌃⌃		⌃⌃	⌃⌃	!	5.9	NA	0.25	40	●		NA	NA	NA
✓ **Hart** HLBL071VNM	86	$270	⌃⌃	!	⌃⌃	⌃⌃		⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	9.8	NA	5	40	●		NA	NA	NA
✓ **Senix** BLAX6-M1	86	$300	–	–	⌃⌃	⌃⌃		⌃	⌃	!	10.7	NA	5	60	●		NA	NA	NA
✓ **Makita** GBU01M1	86	$439	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃		⌃⌃	⌃⌃	!	7.5	NA	3	40	●		NA	NA	NA
$ **Ego** LB6151	85	$200	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃		⌃⌃	⌃⌃	!	8.0	NA	5	56	●		NA	NA	NA

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features + Specs								
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Sweeping	Loosening	Vacuuming	Handling and ease of use	Noise at 50 ft.	Noise at ear	Weight (lb.)	Engine size/ motor power	Warranty (yr.)	Voltage	Multiple speeds	Vacuum capability	Translucent fuel tank	Spring assisted starting	Four-cycle engine
BATTERY HANDHELD BLOWERS *Continued*																			
Ego LB6504	85	$280	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲		▲▲	▲▲	●	10.0	NA	5	56	●		NA	NA	NA
Makita XBU03SM1	85	$260	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲		▲	▲▲	●	6.1	NA	1	18	●		NA	NA	NA
Milwaukee 3017-20-48-59-1862S	85	$500	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲		▲	▲▲	▲	7.5	NA	3	18	●		NA	NA	NA
Ego LB6703	84	$269	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲		▲	▲▲	●	10.1	NA	5	56	●		NA	NA	NA
DeWalt DCBL777Y1	84	$400	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲		▲	▲▲	●	10.3	NA	3	20	●		NA	NA	NA
Toro 51822	84	$299	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲		▲▲	▲▲	●	10.2	NA	3	60	●		NA	NA	
Skil BL4713C-11	84	$159	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲		▲	▲▲	●	6.6	NA	5	40	●		NA	NA	NA
Bad Boy BH80B125A	84	$290	—	—	▲▲	▲▲		▲	▲▲	●	9.4	NA	4	80	●		NA	NA	NA
Ryobi PBLLB01K	84	$214	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲		▲	▲▲	▲	6.9	NA	3	18	●			NA	NA
Makita XBU04PTV	84	$659	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▼	11.2	NA	3	36	●	●	NA	NA	NA
Stihl BGA 57	84	$220	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲		▲▲	▲▲	▲	7.6	NA	3	36			NA	NA	NA
ELECTRIC HANDHELD BLOWERS																			
Toro 51624	79	$80	▲	●	▲▲	▲		▲	▲	▼	6.8	12 amp	2	NA	●		NA		NA
Toro UltraPlus 51621	76	$110	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼	8.7	12 amp	2	NA	●	●	NA	NA	NA
Toro 51619	75	$100	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▼	9.0	12 amp	2	NA	●	●	NA	NA	NA
Ryobi RY421021	74	$50	▲	●	▲▲	▲		▲	▲▲	●	6.8	8 amp	2	NA	●		NA	NA	NA
GASOLINE BACKPACK BLOWERS																			
Troy-Bilt TB51BP	84	$271	●	●	▲▲	▲▲		▲▲	▼	▼▼	22.0	51.0 cc	2	NA	●		●	●	
Husqvarna 360BT	84	$480	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲		▲	▼	▼▼	23.6	65.6 cc	2	NA	●		●		
Stihl BR 350	84	$420	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲		▲▲	●	▼	22.0	63.3 cc	2	NA	●				
Stihl BR-200	83	$350	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲		▲▲	●	▼▼	13.7	27.0 cc	2	NA	●		●		
Echo PB-770T	82	$580	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲		●	▼	▼▼	27.2	63.3 cc	5	NA	●		●		
Husqvarna 150BT	80	$350	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲		▲	▼	▼▼	23.3	51.0 cc	5	NA	●		●		
BATTERY BACKPACK BLOWERS																			
Ego LBPX8004-2	88	$699	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲		▲	▲▲	●	29.5	NA	5	56	●		NA	NA	NA
Greenworks 82BA26-52DP	86	$835	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲		▲	●	▼	24.4	NA	2	72	●		NA	NA	NA
Worx WG572	80	$500	—	—	▲	▲▲		▲	▲▲	●	23.3	NA	5	80	●		NA	NA	NA

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/leafblowers.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on test results and survey data. **Predicted reliability** is how likely a model of a given brand will develop issues within four years of purchase, according to member surveys. **Owner satisfaction** is the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend the model to others. A gray dash (—) indicates insufficient data for brand-level rating. For handheld, backpack, and wheeled leaf blowers, scores are based on measuring how long it takes for each blower to move a large pile of leaves and how well works at **loosening** leaves and other debris that are stuck or embedded in grass. We also factor in **handling** and **noise.**

CORDLESS DRILLS & IMPACT DRIVERS

A cordless drill is the most essential power tool many of us will ever buy. It makes all manner of home projects easier, from assembling furniture to mounting shelves. For tackling heavier-duty jobs, consider an impact driver: It has the power to handle larger fasteners, such as lag bolts and structural screws.

▸ **HOW TO SHOP** Most people will be best served by a general-use drill, with a ⅜-inch chuck and (typically) a 12-volt battery. Those models are powerful enough to drill into wood, while also remaining compact and lightweight.

For small jobs like drilling into drywall, a light-duty model with a ¼-inch socket could be plenty.

Alternately, big projects like building a deck or drilling into brick or concrete are easier with a heavy-duty drill or an impact driver. They are typically powered by 18- to 24-volt batteries and often come with ½-inch chucks, to accept very large drill bits.

An impact driver can apply much more torque than a cordless drill, but you'll need hex-shaped bits, rather than the round bits that can be used with regular drills.

For both drills and impact drivers, nice-to-have features include LED work lights and variable speeds. Shopping in a physical store rather than online can give you a feel for how various models handle.

▸ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't buy more power than you need. A capable 12-volt drill can drive plenty of screws on a single charge. It can also cost less and be less tiring to use.

Hercules HCB91K1
$99

83
OVERALL SCORE

EXPERT TIP

"A drill with multiple speed settings lets you manage both delicate tasks, like assembling furniture, and big jobs where you need to sink many screws quickly."

MATT SCHIMMENTI
Test Leader for Cordless Drills and Impact Drivers

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features + Specs									
			Speed	Power	Run time	Charge time	Handling	Noise	Motor	Battery type	Number of batteries included	Battery recharge time (min.)	Weight (lb.)	Voltage	Speed ranges	Clutch settings	Battery charge indicator	LED work light
LIGHT-DUTY CORDLESS DRILLS (1/4-INCH FIXED HEX CHUCK)																		
DeWalt DCF610S2	58	$115	▲	!	▼	▲	▲▲	▲	Brushed	Lithium	2	60	2.1	12	1	16		●
GENERAL-USE CORDLESS DRILLS (TYPICALLY 12 VOLTS)																		
$ **Hercules** HCB91K1	83	$99	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	!	Brushless	Lithium	1	60-90	4.3	20	2	13	●	●
✓ **Milwaukee** 3403-22	83	$160	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	!	Brushless	Lithium	2	30-75	2.5	12	2	12	●	●
$ **Skil** DL529002	75	$80	▲	▲▲	!	▲▲	▲▲	!	Brushless	Lithium	1	39	2.9	12	2	18	●	●
✓ **Skil** DL6290A-10	75	$69	▲	▲▲	!	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Brushless	Lithium	1	NS	2.6	12	2	17	●	●
✓ **DeWalt** DCD703F1	72	$200	▲	▲▲	!	▲	▲	▲	Brushless	Lithium	1	NS	2.5	12	2	16	●	●
✓ **Makita** FD07R1	71	$199	▲	▲▲	!	▲	▲▲	▲	Brushless	Lithium	2	60	2.3	12	2	21	●	●
✓ **DeWalt** DCD701F2	71	$149	▲	▲▲	!	▲	▲	▲	Brushless	Lithium	2	55	2.4	12	2	16	●	●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features + Specs									
			Speed	Power	Run time	Charge time	Handling	Noise	Motor	Battery type	Number of batteries included	Battery recharge time (min.)	Weight (lb.)	Voltage	Speed ranges	Clutch settings	Battery charge indicator	LED work light
HEAVY-DUTY CORDLESS DRILLS (TYPICALLY 18 TO 20 VOLTS)																		
✓ **Makita** GFD02D	87	$420	⇈	^	⇈	⇈	^	^	Brushless	Lithium	2	28	4.2	40	2	22	●	●
✓ **Makita** XFD16T	87	$355	⇈	⇈	⇈	^	^	I	Brushless	Lithium	2	45	4.7	18	2	21	●	●
✓ **Flex** FX1171T-2B	86	$230	⇈	⇈	⇈	^	I	I	Brushless	Lithium	2	NS	5.1	24	4	22	●	●
✓ **DeWalt** DCD991P2	85	$310	⇈	⇈	⇈	^	v	I	Brushless	Lithium	2	75	4.7	20	3	12	●	●
$ **Kobalt (Lowe's)** KXDD 1424A-03	82	$170	⇈	⇈	⇈	v	I	I	Brushless	Lithium	1	85	4.8	24	2	24	●	●
$ **Kobalt (Lowe's)** KDD 2024A-03	77	$140	⇈	⇈	^	^	^	^	Brushless	Lithium	1	55	4.0	24	2	24	●	●
$ **Bauer** 2191CR-B	76	$110	⇈	^	⇈	I	^	^	Brushless	Lithium	0	NS	4.3	20	2	22	●	●
✓ **Ridgid** R86114KN	75	$170	⇈	⇈	I	^	^	^	Brushless	Lithium	1	NS	3.9	18	2	23	●	●
✓ **Flex** FX1131-1A	73	$150	⇈	^	^	⇈	^	I	Brushless	Lithium	1	30	4.0	24	2	18	●	●
✓ **DeWalt** DCD800D2	71	$190	⇈	^	I	^	^	^	Brushless	Lithium	2	NS	3.7	20	2	16	●	●
✓ **Cat** DX11	71	$185	⇈	^	I	⇈	^	^	Brushless	Lithium	2	35	3.8	18	2	19	●	●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features + Specs									
			Power	Run time	Charge time	Handling	Noise	Weight (lb.)	Voltage	Number of batteries included	Battery recharge time (min.)	Speed ranges	Torque settings	Torque (in.-lb.)	Battery charge indicator	LED work light	Belt hook
STANDARD IMPACT DRIVERS																	
$ **Flex** FX1351-2A	95	$190	⇈	⇈	⇈	I	v	3.8	24	2	30	1	1	1,800	●	●	●
$ **Cat** DX71	91	$180	⇈	^	^	^	v	3.5	18	2	35	3	3	1,900	●	●	●
✓ **Flex** FX1371A-1H	88	$280	⇈	⇈	^	v	v	5.0	24	1	NS	3	3	2,500	●	●	●
✓ **Festool** TID 18 HPC 4,0 I-Plus	87	$385	⇈	⇈	I	^	v	3.5	18	2	NS	3	3	1,593	●	●	●
✓ **Makita** XDT19T	83	$429	⇈	⇈	I	^	v	3.4	18	2	45	4	4	1,590	●	●	●
✓ **Makita** XDT19R	81	$359	⇈	^	⇈	⇈	v	2.8	18	2	24	4	4	1,590	●	●	●
✓ **Greenworks** ID24L1520	81	$160	⇈	^	v	^	v	3.6	24	2	NS	3	2	2,666	●	●	●
COMPACT IMPACT DRIVERS																	
✓ **Milwaukee** 2850-22CT	90	$199	⇈	^	^	^	v	3.0	18	2	NS	1	1	NS	●	●	●
✓ **Makita** XDT16R	86	$300	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	v	2.8	18	2	24	4	4	1,600	●	●	●
✓ **Kobalt (Lowe's)** KXID 1424A-03	81	$180	⇈	^	v	I	v	4.2	24	1	NS	3	4	2,400	●	●	●

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/drills.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on performance ratings in several tests, including a test measuring the tool's **power,** using a dynamometer for drills and a torque meter for impact drivers, and the total **run time** and **charge time** of the tool's battery. For cordless drills, the score encompasses the tool's **speed.** We also assess the expected comfort level when **handling** and the amount of **noise** the tool produces.

REPLACEMENT WINDOWS

Upgrading leaky old windows is an effective way to cut heating and cooling bills, reduce noise, and eliminate drafts. Windows are pricey, and so is installation, so you'll want to get it right. Buying replacements that are the same size as your existing windows will minimize the need for new framing, not to mention siding and trim on the outside of your house. Many energy-efficient windows qualify for federal tax credits of up to $600.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** Start by choosing the window material, or composition. Vinyl tends to be the least expensive option, but most models have limited color options, and vinyl can't be painted or stained. Composite windows, typically made with a mix of fiberglass and other materials, cost somewhat more. And wood windows, which offer a natural look and feel, are typically the most expensive. A handful of windows combine materials, with the charm of wood inside and more weather-resistant vinyl or composite on the exterior.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** Don't replace windows as your main strategy for reducing energy bills. While new windows can help trim those costs, most people will get bigger savings from other projects, such as insulating an attic or upgrading a heating and cooling system.

EXPERT TIP

"Remember to factor in the cost of installation. The average cost is around $600 per window, but it varies widely—and can go as high as $2,000."

KELLY MOOMEY
Market Analyst
for Windows

Pella Lifestyle Series
$800

83
OVERALL SCORE

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results: Wind resistance, 0° F	Wind resistance, 70° F	Rain resistance
WOOD WINDOWS					
✓ **Pella** Lifestyle Series	83	$800	⏫	⬆	⬆
✓ **Andersen** 400 Series Woodwright	71	$530	❗	⏫	⬆
VINYL WINDOWS					
✓ **Preservation** Window Series	88	$550	⏫	⏫	⏫
✓ **Reliabilt (Lowe's)** 3500 Series	87	$325	⏫	⏫	⬆
✓ **Jeld-Wen** V-4500 Series	84	$450	⏫	⏫	⬆
✓ **American Craftsman** 70 Pro Series	82	$350	⏫	⬆	⬆
✓ **Simonton** Reflections 5500	77	$350	⏫	⬆	❗
$ **Pella** 150 Series	76	$230	⏫	⏫	❗
$ **American Craftsman** 50 Series	73	$220	⏫	⬆	⬆
COMPOSITE WINDOWS					
$ **Andersen** A-Series	87	$500	⏫	⏫	⬆
✓ **Marvin** Essential	86	$900	⏫	⏫	⬆

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/windows.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on performance ratings. We order 3x5-foot double-hung windows from a variety of manufacturers and focus our tests on how well a window can withstand the elements. We install each window in a wooden frame and seal one side before testers use a specially made device that simulates **wind.** The engineers gradually raise the airflow velocity to 50 mph and measure air leakage with a flow meter. They run this test at 0° F and 70° F to evaluate whether a frame holds up even as materials contract and expand at varied temperatures. To test **rain resistance,** we simulate windblown rain by pelting the window with 5 gallons of water per square foot per hour. (Windows that earn an excellent rating in this test can withstand simulated winds up to 74 mph, or gale-force winds. The worst windows started leaking when winds reached about 35 mph.)

WORSE ⏬ 🔽 ❗ 🔼 ⏫ BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | $ CR SMART BUY

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

Nissan Murano

For its 2025 redesign, Nissan's two-row SUV loses its slick V6 engine and continuously variable transmission in favor of a turbocharged four-cylinder engine with a nine-speed automatic. With optional all-wheel drive, EPA-estimated fuel economy is 23 mpg combined.

CR'S TAKE The Murano is stylish, inside and out, and its interior is more comfortable than its predecessor's. But visibility is compromised and acceleration feels lurchy. The small touchscreen and steering wheel controls are confusing. Despite its size, there's not much cargo room.

BASE PRICE RANGE $40,470-$49,600
DESTINATION CHARGE $1,390
PRICE AS DRIVEN $49,320

ASK OUR EXPERTS

My dealer tried to sell me a prepaid maintenance plan. Should I get one?

Potentially. These plans cover routine scheduled maintenance but often **exclude "wear items" like brakes and tires.** Take time to **compare the costs**—dealers often pitch the plan when you're signing the final paperwork to buy the car, but **you can usually decide after you leave.** For example, if the plan primarily covers oil and filter changes, **it might cost less to have an independent mechanic do the same work.** Logistics are also a factor. If the plan is backed by the manufacturer, you can use it at any dealership that sells the brand, but **other plans may limit where you can get service.**

THE VITAL STATISTIC

54%

The percentage of motor vehicle fatalities that occurred at night in 2023. However, only 25 percent of all driving takes place at night, when visibility is low and the numbers of impaired or fatigued drivers increases. When driving at night, increase the distance between you and the cars in front of you, and pay extra attention to your surroundings.

Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

RECALL

General Motors

General Motors is recalling more than 90,000 Cadillac CT4, CT5, and CT6 sedans and Chevrolet Camaro sports cars with a 10-speed automatic transmission. A fluid leak inside the gearbox could cause the wheels to lock while the vehicle is moving.

WHAT TO DO Cadillac and Chevrolet dealers will provide a free software update that the automaker says will monitor the transmission for wear and damage. Owners may call Cadillac at 800-333-4223 or Chevrolet at 800-222-1020.

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

How to Read a Car's Safety Score

The stars on a car's window sticker tell you how it performed in government crash tests, but because many new cars earn a five out of five, that score doesn't always indicate the safety differences among models.

Check **CR.org/cars** for ratings from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, an insurance industry-funded safety group and a CR partner. Vehicles that earn the IIHS' Top Safety Pick (TSP) or TSP+ award excel in the latest crash tests, which are tougher than the government's. You can also see whether proven safety tech like automatic emergency braking (AEB), blind spot warning (BSW), and rear cross traffic warning (RCTW) are standard or optional for a specific model.

PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

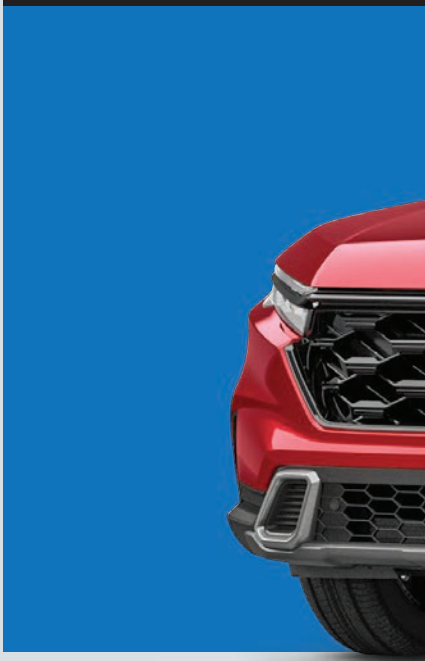
Popular Cars to Avoid

(And What to Buy Instead)

The bestselling and best-known models aren't always tops for safety, reliability, or comfort. CR's auto pros have picks for better options in many categories.

by Keith Barry

SMALL SUV



WHEN SHOPPING for a new car, it's easy to let your emotions take over. You might start out by looking at important factors such as safety and reliability. But then other influences creep in, like a brand's popularity, a flashy design, or—given today's average new-car price of nearly $50,000 and market uncertainty about tariffs—a really deep discount.

Letting those factors guide your buying decision can leave you stuck with a car purchase you'll regret, and our testing and survey data prove it. For example, the Volkswagen Jetta far outsold the Mazda3 in 2024, but Mazda owners told us they were happier with their cars.

Similarly, we found that Mercedes-Benz's confusing controls took some of the luster off the brand's luxury image, the Nissan Pathfinder's discounted price didn't make up for its below-average reliability, and newer EVs couldn't match the Ford Mustang Mach-E, now in its fifth model year, for satisfaction.

"Don't just follow the crowd when buying a new car," says Jake Fisher, senior director of auto testing at Consumer Reports. "Your neighbor might like their new car, but when it's time for you to choose, take the advice of experts who have compared that model to every one of its competitors and incorporated the feedback from hundreds of thousands of owners."

To help you choose a new vehicle you'll love, we put together a list of popular cars, trucks, SUVs, and minivans that aren't CR Recommended despite their high sales volume, attractive discounts, or respected brand names. Then we examined our road tests and reliability and owner satisfaction surveys to find better alternatives. These Smarter Choices might be less popular or slightly more expensive, but at a time when every dollar counts more than ever, we think they'll make you happier (and save you money on repairs) in the long run.

WORSE — BETTER

CR RECOMMENDED

Ford Escape Hybrid

$34,190-$38,400

54 OVERALL SCORE | 82 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

The Escape Hybrid might look like a good value. It gets an impressive 34 mpg overall, has nimble handling and smooth acceleration, and costs less than many competitors. But CR members who own this vehicle complained about problems with the powertrain, infotainment system, and overall build quality. As a result, the Escape Hybrid has a predicted reliability score that's among the lowest for new vehicles.

Honda CR-V Hybrid

$34,650-$41,100

83 OVERALL SCORE | 93 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

The CR-V Hybrid costs just a smidge more than a comparable Escape Hybrid, but we think it's a better choice. It has better predicted reliability and owner satisfaction scores than the Ford, which will probably mean lower ownership costs and a higher resale value. And it gets 35 mpg overall, has great visibility and cargo room, and boasts some of the easiest-to-use climate and infotainment controls of any new vehicle.

MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUV

Nissan Pathfinder

$36,400-$50,640

65 OVERALL SCORE | 81 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

Buyers in the market for a three-row SUV might be tempted by the Pathfinder's low price. Making it even more enticing is that Nissan dropped its MSRP by up to $1,170 for 2025. Although the Pathfinder benefits from user-friendly controls and responsive handling, this SUV lags behind many competitors in reliability and owner satisfaction. Plus, the Pathfinder manages only 21 mpg overall.

Toyota Highlander Hybrid

$46,320-$53,970

81 OVERALL SCORE | 86 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

There's a reason the Highlander Hybrid sets the standard for three-row SUVs. It has a comfortable second row, tons of cargo space, and secure handling for a vehicle this size. Although we've seen dealerships mark up the price on the Highlander Hybrid due to strong demand, its 35 mpg fuel economy could save the average driver $700 per year in gas compared with the Nissan.

LUXURY SUV

Mercedes-Benz GLC

$49,250-$91,450

58 OVERALL SCORE | 79 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

Mercedes-Benz is advertising discounts of up to $2,000 on the stylish GLC, which is available in both gas-only and plug-in hybrid (PHEV) versions. But below-average predicted reliability, mushy brakes, a transmission that feels lurchy in around-town driving, and a too-firm ride help to explain its low owner satisfaction score, along with its confusing climate and infotainment control setup.

Lexus NX Hybrid

$45,425-$51,490

83 OVERALL SCORE | 84 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

The Lexus NX is one of our favorite SUVs, and the hybrid is the best version. It has above-average predicted reliability and high owner satisfaction, its comfortable ride and responsive handling make it ideal for road trips and errands, and fuel economy of 38 mpg overall could save drivers $500 per year compared with the Mercedes. The infotainment system is easier to use than the GLC's, as well.

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

LUXURY SUV

POPULAR CHOICE

Land Rover Range Rover Sport

$83,700-$180,700

60 OVERALL SCORE | 81 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

With its distinctive tall and boxy silhouette, luxurious styling, and storied brand history, the Range Rover Sport announces an owner's arrival in style. But they'll be going nowhere fast—despite the powerful 355-hp six-cylinder engine (or optional V8)—if their vehicle is in the shop. The Land Rover brand has below-average predicted reliability and is in the middle of the pack when it comes to owner satisfaction.

SMARTER CHOICE

BMW X5

$66,300-$127,200

87 OVERALL SCORE | 94 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

Land Rover may have invented the luxury SUV, but BMW perfected it. The X5 is less expensive and more reliable than the Range Rover, and we think it's more fun to drive, too. A V8 is optional, but the X5's standard 3.0-liter turbocharged six-cylinder is sufficiently quick and smooth. The interior is whisper-quiet and extremely comfortable. Owners in CR surveys agree: Over 80 percent say they'd purchase one again.

SPORTS CAR

POPULAR CHOICE

Volkswagen Golf GTI

$32,445-$40,880

68 OVERALL SCORE | 85 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

Volkswagen created the "hot hatchback" when it introduced the GTI in 1983, adding high-performance attributes to a small car. Today's Golf GTI still blends invigorating acceleration, agile handling, and a practical design, but it suffers from below-average predicted reliability and hard-to-use controls. Plus, Volkswagen no longer offers a manual transmission on the GTI, which makes the driving experience less engaging.

SMARTER CHOICE

Subaru WRX

$35,750-$45,705

80 OVERALL SCORE | 83 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

The all-wheel drive WRX has origins in dirt-road rally-car racing. Because of the stiff ride and loud engine, it feels a lot less refined than the GTI, but that's part of the fun of driving the WRX. As a brand, Subaru has more reliable offerings than Volkswagen, too. Bonus points to Subaru for still offering an optional six-speed manual transmission on the WRX.

PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS (LAND ROVER)

SEDAN

Volkswagen Jetta

$22,495-$32,715

53 OVERALL SCORE | 78 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

Since the 1980s, the Volkswagen Jetta has had a reputation as a practical sedan with sporty handling and a slightly more luxurious feel than other cars in its class, despite its relatively low price. But the latest model doesn't live up to its predecessors, with dull handling and vague steering feel. Reliability is below average, and only half of Jetta owners in CR surveys say they'd buy one again.

Mazda3

$24,150-$37,150

78 OVERALL SCORE | 77 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

When it comes to small sedans that offer well-appointed interiors and engaging driving experiences, the mantle has been passed from the Jetta to the Mazda3. Sporty and practical, the Mazda may cost a bit more than the VW, but our surveys show it's more reliable. Unlike the Jetta, the Mazda3 is available with all-wheel drive and also comes as a hatchback.

LUXURY SEDAN

Mercedes-Benz C-Class

$48,450-$86,050

65 OVERALL SCORE | 75 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

The Mercedes C-Class vs. the BMW 3 Series is a classic rivalry, but we think there's a clear champion. Yes, the C-Class has sharp steering and a powerful, responsive four-cylinder engine, but its ride is stiff and its in-car technology and controls are overly complex. In fact, it has the lowest owner satisfaction score among luxury compact cars. Fewer than half of the current C-Class owners surveyed said they'd buy another.

BMW 3 Series

$45,950-$85,300

74 OVERALL SCORE | 86 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

The 3 Series is just as well-appointed and engaging to drive as the C-Class, but it doesn't have any of its shortcomings. Its interior is equally welcoming, its suspension does a good job absorbing bumps, and the infotainment system and controls are easier to use. That's why the 3 Series outperformed the C-Class in both our road-test and owner satisfaction scores.

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

ELECTRIC SUV

Chevrolet Blazer EV

$44,600-$60,600

39 OVERALL SCORE | 68 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

With about 280 miles of electric driving range and relatively quick home charging, the Chevrolet Blazer EV might seem appealing. But this vehicle—the first one built with an all-new design for the battery, charging, and motor that GM calls Ultium—has had some growing pains. As a result, its predicted reliability is far below average. It also lacks Android Auto and Apple CarPlay compatibility.

Ford Mustang Mach-E

$36,495-$52,495

68 OVERALL SCORE | 74 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

The Mustang Mach-E is slightly smaller than the Blazer EV on the outside, but its interior space is about the same size. It also beats the Blazer EV on battery range, and unlike the Chevrolet, its 15.5-inch touchscreen is compatible with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay. Now in its fifth model year, the Mustang Mach-E has shown continuous improvement in its reliability.

PHOTOS: MAZDA; MERCEDES-BENZ

MINIVAN

Chrysler Pacifica PHEV

$51,055-$59,785

59 OVERALL SCORE | 86 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

If you want a lot of space, nothing beats a modern minivan. Chrysler invented this vehicle type over four decades ago, and it's still great for hauling people and stuff in comfort. Although we appreciate the Pacifica Plug-In Hybrid's roomy interior and 32 miles of all-electric range, it has below-average reliability and low owner satisfaction scores. The Plug-In Hybrid isn't available with all-wheel drive, either.

Toyota Sienna

$39,185-$56,905

77 OVERALL SCORE | 84 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

The Toyota Sienna may not get the attractive discounts that Chrysler offers on the Pacifica, but it comes standard as a hybrid and can get a truly impressive 36 mpg overall for a cruising range of 650 miles between fill-ups. That's better than many midsized sedans. It has higher predicted reliability and owner satisfaction scores than the Pacifica PHEV, plus a lower price. All-wheel drive is optional.

MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCK

Toyota Tacoma

$31,590-$63,735

45 OVERALL SCORE | 59 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

Even after a 2024 redesign, Toyota's popular midsized pickup still has a stiff ride, clumsy handling, and a gritty-sounding engine. The Tacoma may have a reputation as a reliable, go-anywhere hauler, but people who actually drive the redesigned truck told us a different story. Our owner surveys show below-average predicted reliability and middle-of-the-pack owner satisfaction.

Honda Ridgeline

$40,150-$46,750

79 OVERALL SCORE | 83 ROAD TEST | RELIABILITY | OWNER SATISFACTION

The Ridgeline can't tackle tough off-road trails or tow as much as the Tacoma, but it excels at around-town driving and weekend warrior tasks like hauling mulch and carrying bikes. Overall, the SUV-like Ridgeline is far easier to live with than the Tacoma, thanks to better handling, a quieter interior, and standard blind spot warning. It even has a hidden trunk under the bed for groceries.

PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS (TOYOTA)

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

Make Your Car Last 150,000 Miles

BY JEFF S. BARTLETT

KEEPING YOUR CAR RUNNING WELL for 150,000 miles is a true financial win, according to CR's auto experts. By then, depreciation slows down, and even as you start paying for more expensive repairs, your overall ownership costs dwindle.

Want to make sure your car lasts for the long haul, with fewer pricey problems? It helps to start with a model known for above-average reliability. (Go to **CR.org/reliability**.) Ideally, choose from a brand with lower-than-average maintenance and repair costs.

For any vehicle, the first step is to check the maintenance timeline in the owner's manual, and follow it to the letter. "The better you take care of your car, the better it will take care of you," says John Ibbotson, CR's chief mechanic.

Of course, any car's parts will eventually wear out and need replacing, and expensive maintenance bills can be painful. However, it helps to see them coming. Here's what you can expect to spend over those years of ownership.

0-36,000 MILES

Maintenance will be limited to regular oil changes, tire rotations, and inspecting the brakes, wipers, and tires for wear. You can save money by replacing simple items yourself, such as wiper blades and cabin air filters. (The latter is less complicated than it sounds and is explained in your owner's manual.) Beyond these "wear items," the vehicle's various parts and systems will be covered by a warranty, so go to the dealership for any other repairs. Some automakers, such as Nissan and Toyota, include limited free maintenance for the first two years.

OIL CHANGE AND TIRE ROTATION $179-$227, every 5,000-10,000 miles
WINDSHIELD WIPER BLADES $109-$123, every 6 months

36,000-60,000 MILES

You'll probably need new tires, but you don't need to buy the same ones that came with your car—they might not be your best option. Head to **CR.org/tires** to find CR Recommended models. Once you've decided, check the manufacturer's website for rebates—often around $100 per set. After replacing the tires, your mechanic should also perform a four-wheel alignment. Your brake pads and brake rotors could be nearing the end of their service life, too. Have a mechanic inspect and, if necessary, replace them in pairs.

12V BATTERY $270
TIRES $760
WHEEL ALIGNMENT $329-$420, for four wheels
FRONT BRAKE PADS AND ROTORS $570-$661 for pair

60,000-100,000 MILES

By now, most vehicles are 5 or more years old and out of warranty. Regularly check the tires for wear—replace when an upside-down quarter in the tread shows all of Washington's head. If the car feels bouncy or otherwise rides differently from normal, have your mechanic check the suspension parts—shock absorbers, struts, bushings. Like brake parts, replace any suspension parts in pairs, and finish with a four-wheel alignment. Remain faithful to the oil and tire rotation schedules.

FRONT STRUTS $1,219-$1,410, for both
REAR STRUTS $692-$846, for both
SUSPENSION ARMS $667-$812, for both, front
REAR BRAKE PADS AND ROTORS $559-$708 for pair

100,000-150,000 MILES

Expect major services, such as a timing-belt replacement. (However, most newer cars use a more durable timing chain, which should last the lifetime of the car.) You should also plan to replace items like the starter, alternator, spark plugs, and suspension parts. Collectively, those costs can be significant, but you probably won't have to pay them again for a while. "In theory, if you get that stuff replaced in the 100,000- to 150,000-mile range, the cycle starts again and you should be good for a long time," Ibbotson says.

TIRES $760
WATER PUMP ASSEMBLY $773
SPARK PLUGS $236-$281
ALTERNATOR $558-$594

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

Prices are for a 2023 Toyota RAV4 based on parts and labor pricing in the Yonkers, N.Y., area collected using the Car Repair Assistant **(CR.org/repair)** powered by RepairPal, Tire Rack, and CR's experts.

ELECTRIC PICKUP TRUCKS

Tesla Cybertruck

Fast and Capable, but Poor Visibility

58
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 79

HIGHS Quick acceleration, agile handling, short stopping distances, relatively speedy charging, powered cargo cover

LOWS Unintuitive controls, unpredictable steering, poor outward visibility, not as quiet as other EVs

POWERTRAIN 600-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; all-wheel drive

RANGE 325 miles[E]

PRICE $69,990-$99,990 base price + $1,995 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $81,985

BY MIKE MONTICELLO

WITH ANGULAR, SLAB-SIDED styling that evokes comparisons with everything from a sci-fi creation to a refrigerator on wheels, the Cybertruck is one of the most polarizing vehicles ever sold. We found it quick and agile. Unlike most pickups, the Cybertruck's ride is stable and pretty comfortable. It's certainly a daring design, but it doesn't improve all that much upon traditional trucks. Plus, the controls are distracting to use, and visibility is terrible.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

With 600 hp from dual electric motors, our Cybertruck zoomed from 0 to 60 mph in an impressive 4.1 seconds. Unlike in most EVs, you can't adjust the regenerative braking levels. Instead, it's stuck in one-pedal driving mode, which lets you brake by releasing the accelerator pedal. But the level of deceleration is too intense at very low speeds, such as in a driveway or parking lot, which makes it unexpectedly challenging to drive smoothly.

The Cybertruck is agile for its size and weight because of very little body lean through corners, rear-wheel steering, and a steer-by-wire system. But the automatically adjusting, rapidly changing steering ratio isn't linear: A slight turn of the steering wheel at low speeds results in an unpredictable, overly quick reaction. Still, unlike traditional body-on-frame pickups that can feel twisty and jiggly, the Cybertruck's unified structure makes it feel solid.

CABIN COMFORT

The lack of an instrument screen behind the steering wheel means you can position the wheel without obstructing the gauges. But its oblong shape forces you to grip it only at the 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock positions.

Outward visibility is poor. The extremely deep dashboard and dramatically sloping windshield make it difficult to see what's directly ahead. The superlong and thick windshield pillars create significant blind spots, and the tiny rearview mirror allows only a narrow view out back.

Our testers universally praised the front seats, which are firmly padded yet comfortable. The rear seat is roomy, with a more natural seatback angle than in most pickup trucks.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

Nearly every interior function is handled through the giant center screen, making most controls difficult. The turn signal buttons on the steering wheel force you to look down every time you need to activate them. Even operating the gear selector involves sliding a finger along the screen. And the lack of Android Auto or Apple CarPlay capability in Teslas is a continuing inconvenience.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

COMPACT HYBRID SEDANS

Honda Civic Hybrid

Impressive Fuel Efficiency and a Smooth Ride

79
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 85

HIGHS Excellent fuel economy, engaging hybrid powertrain, easy-to-use controls

LOWS Loud cabin, low-slung stance makes getting in and out difficult

POWERTRAIN 200-hp, 2.0-liter 4-cylinder hybrid engine; electronic continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive

FUEL 44 mpg on regular

PRICE $28,950-$33,150 base price + $1,150 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $30,300

REINTRODUCED FOR 2025 after a decade-long hiatus, the Civic Hybrid is back and better than ever. It's not only more fuel-efficient than the regular Civic but also much quicker. Add in sharp handling, a comfortable ride, and intuitive controls, and it's one of the best compact cars on the market.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

When it comes to numbers, the Civic Hybrid's 44 mpg overall is darn good—though it does trail the hybrid versions of the Hyundai Elantra and Toyota Corolla by 4 mpg. What helps make up for that deficit is the way Honda's two-motor hybrid system mimics the upshifts of a regular automatic, keeping revs and engine noise at bay. By comparison, the continuously variable transmissions (CVTs) found in some other hybrids let the engine revs soar, producing unpleasant noise.

Further, the Civic Hybrid's powertrain slashes about 2 seconds off the regular model's 0-to-60-mph time.

Thanks to suspension changes for 2025 and the added weight of the hybrid system, the ride is much more compliant than in the last Civic we tested, which we found stiff and choppy. Handling remains nimble, and the car is enjoyable to drive on a twisty road due to precise steering and minimal body roll through corners. It managed a commendable 55 mph during our avoidance maneuver test.

But the cabin is still loud. Road noise is so elevated at highway speeds that occupants have to raise their voices during a conversation, which gets tiring on long drives.

CABIN COMFORT

The low-slung cabin is difficult to get into and out of, requiring ducking on the way in and hoisting up to get back out. Once inside, there's good headroom but the center console intrudes into the driver's right knee space. We didn't love the front seats in the Sport Hybrid model we tested because they're short on both adjustability and lower back support. The rear seat, however, is reasonably roomy and comfortable for the class.

As with most compact cars, the Civic's interior isn't fancy, but it gets the details right. We like the cool honeycomb dashboard vents, as well as the distinct "click-click" sound when you turn the high-quality climate-control knobs.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

In an era of touchscreens for everything, the Civic's simple and straightforward controls make the car feel approachable. We appreciate the volume and tuning knobs and the physical buttons at the base of the infotainment screen that make it quick and easy to change between menus.

ELECTRIC SUVs

Chevrolet Equinox EV

Quiet and Comfortable, With a Good Driving Range

56
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 74

HIGHS Quick acceleration, comfortable ride, quiet cabin, excellent Super Cruise active driving assistance system

LOWS A few unintuitive controls, no Android Auto or Apple CarPlay, fussy electronic exterior door handles

POWERTRAIN 288-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; all-wheel drive

RANGE 285 miles[E]

PRICE $33,600-$46,700 base price + $1,395 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $50,740

THE EQUINOX EV is a pleasant, easy to live with SUV that holds its own against similarly sized and priced electric models. It's quick and quiet, rides comfortably, and has a long driving range. But it lacks Android Auto and Apple CarPlay capability, and some of the controls are unintuitive and distracting.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

The 288-hp, dual-motor powertrain builds speed effortlessly. It feels zippy most of the time, but the 6 seconds it takes to go from 0 to 60 mph trails some rival EVs by more than a second. We found the one-pedal driving mode, which allows you to brake the car just by lifting your foot off the accelerator, smooth to operate. It's easy to time stopping points without having to step on the brake pedal at all.

The Environmental Protection Agency's estimated driving range is a respectable 285 miles on our 2024 tested vehicle, which increased to 307 miles for 2025. But be aware that its 150-kW maximum acceptance rate at DC fast chargers means the Equinox won't charge as quickly on a road trip as some other EVs.

Ride comfort is a strong suit. The suspension absorbs bumps effectively, helping the SUV cruise down the road in a relaxed manner. It has fairly quick steering, but noticeable body roll through turns keeps the Chevy from feeling sporty.

CABIN COMFORT

Because of its whisper-quiet electric drive and low levels of road and wind noise, the cabin stays hushed. The front seats are reasonably comfortable, but the flat shape doesn't hold you in place very well through turns. Front headroom is plentiful, and the armrests are well-placed, though the center one is poorly padded. The top of the super-deep dashboard can cause glare on the windshield, which hinders the driver's outward visibility.

The rear seat is roomy, but the bottom cushion has little underleg support. Unlike some SUVs, the seatback can't be reclined, and it's too upright.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

Like several other EVs, the Equinox has retractable exterior door handles. In most vehicles, a popped-out handle means the door is unlocked, but that's not always the case here. Plus, the handle is thin and awkward to grab.

The infotainment touchscreen is crowded with apps, shortcuts, and buttons, which make it difficult to use. The left steering wheel stalk has a complicated secondary function for the windshield and rear-window wipers, and it's easy to accidentally activate them. The right stalk serves as the gear selector, and its operation can take some getting used to.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

MIDSIZED THREE-ROW SUVs

GMC Acadia

Roomy and Very Functional, but With a Noisy Engine

70
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 77

HIGHS Comfortable ride, roomy second-row seat, generous cargo capacity

LOWS Noisy engine, some unintuitive controls

POWERTRAIN 328-hp, 2.5-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 20 mpg on regular

PRICE $43,000-$56,100 base price + $1,495 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $49,190

THE REDESIGNED ACADIA has grown in nearly every dimension, adding passenger and cargo room that make it more competitive with other three-row midsized models. The one area where it got smaller is under the hood. GMC replaced the previous version's V6 engine with a more powerful 2.5-liter turbocharged four-cylinder.

We think the Acadia remains a well-rounded family SUV, thanks to its comfortable ride, roomy cabin, and generous standard features. But the new engine's coarse and gravelly sound is a big drawback.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

The Acadia's turbo four-cylinder produces an energetic 328 hp. It provides strong and linear acceleration free of any delays or abruptness off the line, and the transmission shifts smoothly. Acceleration is quick among three-row SUVs, but its 20 mpg overall is mediocre. Some rival midsized SUVs with smoother and quieter six-cylinder engines get better fuel economy.

A well-tuned suspension enables the Acadia to sail easily over all kinds of surfaces. For a sizable SUV, the handling is solid. The steering is precise, and the Acadia proved secure when pushed to its limits around our track.

CABIN COMFORT

There's generous headroom up front, but we found the left footrest to be too close and upright for optimal comfort, causing many drivers to feel cramped. Some also struggled to get comfortable in the flat-shaped front seats, which lack adequate side bolstering to provide lateral support.

The second-row captain's chairs in our tested vehicle—a bench seat is also available—are wide with comfy cushions, and there's lots of space all-around. As with most competitors, the Acadia's third-row seat is best reserved for kids due to tight headroom and knee room, although it's larger than in the previous model. Opening the liftgate reveals a significant amount of space behind the upright third-row seat, plus there's a deep underfloor storage cubby.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

The controls are a mixed bag. The infotainment screen is large, but its portrait orientation (it's taller than it is wide) places some controls down low, forcing the driver to look far away from the road.

Other controls are inconvenient. For example, the large volume knob is nearly flush with the display screen, which makes it difficult to grab. And the left steering wheel stalk has a complicated secondary function for the windshield and rear-window wipers, which can lead to accidental activations.

MINIVANS

Kia Carnival Hybrid

Fuel-Efficient and Spacious

81

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 86

HIGHS Excellent fuel economy, pleasant hybrid powertrain, interior room

LOWS Long wet-stopping distance, dual-use panel for audio and climate controls is a nuisance, removing the second-row seats for extra cargo space is a chore

POWERTRAIN 242-hp, 1.6-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder hybrid engine; 6-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive

FUEL 31 mpg on regular

PRICE $40,800-$52,900 base price + $1,435 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $44,855

KIA'S ROOMY, COMFORTABLE, and refined Carnival is now available as a fuel-efficient hybrid. Other updates for 2025 include mild interior and exterior enhancements, revised controls, and standard adaptive cruise control. After testing was complete, the Carnival Hybrid vaulted to the top of our minivan ratings.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

We found the Carnival's hybrid system—which combines a 1.6-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine, a six-speed automatic transmission, and an electric drive—to be a fine combination. It supplies ample acceleration, although at times inconsistently. The electric torque can be abrupt off the line, making it easy to spin the front tires, which is then followed by a delay from the gas engine while it's engaging.

Our Hybrid got 31 mpg overall, a 10-mpg boost over the V6 Carnival. While commendable, it falls short of the Toyota Sienna (available only as a hybrid), which gets 36 mpg. A long cruising range of over 550 miles is a bonus.

Although the Carnival doesn't shine in terms of agility, it was balanced and controlled through our avoidance maneuver test. Its suspension takes the edge off bumps, too. And when a burst of speed is needed, its four-cylinder doesn't sound anywhere near as strained as the Sienna's noisy engine.

CABIN COMFORT

Cabin decor in the midtrim EX we tested is functional, not fancy. Still, Kia included a few nice touches throughout, such as the glossy black instrument panel and infotainment screen, a leather-wrapped steering wheel, and controls that feel solid and substantial.

The Carnival's front seats are wide, supportive, and comfortable for long drives. But while the second-row seat has lots of headroom, thigh support could be better. The third row is low and firm but fairly roomy, making the Carnival a true eight-passenger vehicle. Keep in mind that the heavy second-row seats are difficult to remove when you need maximum cargo space.

Small-item storage up front is a bit scant compared with other vans, but the wireless charging pad and abundance of USB ports are handy.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

The rotary-style gear selector takes some getting used to. Much worse is the single panel that can control either the audio or climate functions, which is just as annoying here as it is in other Kia models. At least the controls for the sliding side doors and liftgate have been moved from the driver's dash to the overhead console, where they're much easier for the front passenger to reach.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

[E]EPA-estimated range.

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

Ratings › **Something for Everyone** This group includes the compact Civic Hybrid, the long-range Equinox EV, the sensible Acadia, the capacious Carnival, and the polarizing Cybertruck.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results										ADAS
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Acceleration, 0–60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60–0 mph, ft.	BSW/RCTW
ELECTRIC PICKUPS															
Chevrolet Silverado EV	64	$96,495	⌄	⌃	81	NA	450[E]	⌃ / ⌃	–	⌃	⌃	⌃	–	4.4	150	S
Ford F-150 Lightning	62	$80,889	⌄	–	81	NA	270	⌃ / ⌃⌃	–	⌃⌃	⌃	–	–	4.3	144	S
Tesla Cybertruck	58	$81,985	⌄	⌃⌃	79	NA	325[E]	⌃ / ⌃	⌄⌄	–	⌃	⌃	–	4.1	123	S
Rivian R1T	55	$74,500	⌄⌄	⌃⌃	84	NA	334	⌃ / ⌃	⌄⌄	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	3.8	135	S
COMPACT HYBRID SEDANS															
✓ Hyundai Elantra Hybrid 1.6H	82	$24,900	⌃	–	85	48	530	– / –	⌃⌃	–	⌃	–	⌃	8.7	127	S
✓ Honda Civic Hybrid 2.0H	79	$30,300	–	⌃	85	44	465	⌃ / ⌃	⌃⌃	⌄	⌃	–	⌃	7.5	131	S
✓ Toyota Corolla Hybrid 1.8H	75	$25,145	⌃	–	75	48	550	– / –	⌃	–	⌃	–	⌃	10.3	142	O
ELECTRIC SUVs															
✓ Ford Mustang Mach-E	68	$55,800	–	⌃	74	NA	299	⌃ / ⌃	–	⌃⌃	–	⌃	⌃⌃	5.3	136	S
Hyundai Ioniq 5	64	$51,020	⌄	–	89	NA	290[E]	⌃ / ⌃	–	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	4.7	131	S
Chevrolet Equinox EV	56	$50,740	⌄	⌃	74	NA	285[E]	⌃ / ⌃	–	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	6.0	130	S
Honda Prologue	56	$56,550	⌄	⌃	72	NA	277	⌃ / ⌃	⌃	⌃	–	⌃	⌃	6.2	140	S
Chevrolet Blazer EV	39	$60,000	⌄⌄	⌃	68	NA	275	– / ⌃	–	⌃	–	⌃	⌃	6.3	139	S
MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs															
✓ Subaru Ascent 2.4T	80	$43,867	–	–	90	22	420	⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	–	8.0	129	S
✓ Honda Pilot 3.5L	79	$50,240	–	–	85	21	380	⌃ / ⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	–	7.7	129	S
✓ Hyundai Palisade 3.8L	79	$43,415	–	⌃	85	21	395	⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	–	7.1	132	S
✓ Kia Telluride 3.8L	76	$40,855	–	⌃	92	21	390	⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	–	7.2	127	S
✓ Chevrolet Traverse 2.5T	74	$49,460	–	–	76	20	440	⌃ / ⌃⌃	–	–	⌃	⌃	–	7.3	131	S
✓ GMC Acadia 2.5T	70	$49,190	–	–	77	20	440	⌃ / ⌃⌃	–	–	⌃	⌃	–	7.6	132	S
✓ Ford Explorer 2.3T	68	$49,940	–	–	74	21	370	⌃ / ⌃	⌃	⌃	–	⌃	⌃	7.4	136	S
✓ Toyota Grand Highlander 2.4T	68	$49,457	–	–	81	22	390	⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	–	8.0	134	S
Mazda CX-90 3.3T	64	$48,670	⌄	–	85	24	435	⌃ / ⌃	⌄	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	7.2	128	S
Volkswagen Atlas 2.0T	53	$47,121	⌄	⌄	78	20	360	⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌄	⌃	–	⌃⌃	⌃	7.7	124	S
HYBRID MINIVANS															
✓ Kia Carnival Hybrid 1.6T+H	81	$44,855	⌃	⌃	86	31	580	⌃ / ⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	–	8.5	136	S
✓ Toyota Sienna 2.5H	77	$43,570	–	⌃	84	36	650	⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	–	–	8.2	148	S

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: The **Overall Score** combines **road-test results,** survey data for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction,** and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. O means that the safety system is optional on at least some trim levels; S means that the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's active driving assistance system has inadequate direct driver monitoring.

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Not-So-Great Deals

We test over 2,300 products each year and find many that offer great performance and value. But some fall short, with low scores to match their low prices. CR's advice: Steer clear of the 'bargains' below.

Subpar Hatchback

CHEVROLET TRAX $20,500-$24,500

58 OVERALL SCORE

The Trax may have an appealing price, but it's one of the lowest-rated hatchbacks in our tests, ranking 18th out of 19 models. The turbo three-cylinder's power delivery is uneven, the cabin is noisy, the front seats are uncomfortable, and—though it looks like an SUV—there's no option to get all-wheel drive.

Wimpy Washer

MIDEA MLTW41A1BWW $665

It had one job—and didn't do it well at all: This top-load agitator model received our worst score for washing performance.

Disappointing Drill

BLACK+DECKER BDCDD12C $40

One of the least expensive general-use drills in our ratings, this cordless model also has the lowest Overall Score. It's not very powerful, it's slow at drilling and driving screws, and the battery takes a long time to recharge.

Super-Slow Video

ECO4LIFE SC-VDBC-1001 $75

A slow response time—how long it takes to see a live video after someone presses the doorbell—sent this model toward the bottom of our ratings.

Dehumidifier Dud

COSTWAY ES10260US-WH $154

The cheery yellow finish is nice, but this lower-priced dehumidifier's performance in our water removal tests was dismal. Energy efficiency was poor, too.

Unimpressive Blender

COOKS 22348/22348C $80

It couldn't purée vegetables into a smooth soup and it failed our ice-crush durability test, but this basic blender did excel at making smoothies.

Poor Air Purifier

CRANE EE-5073 AIR PURIFIER $60

If you want to remove dust, pollen, and smoke from your air, you might have to spend a little more money. This budget purifier performed poorly at both low and high speeds.

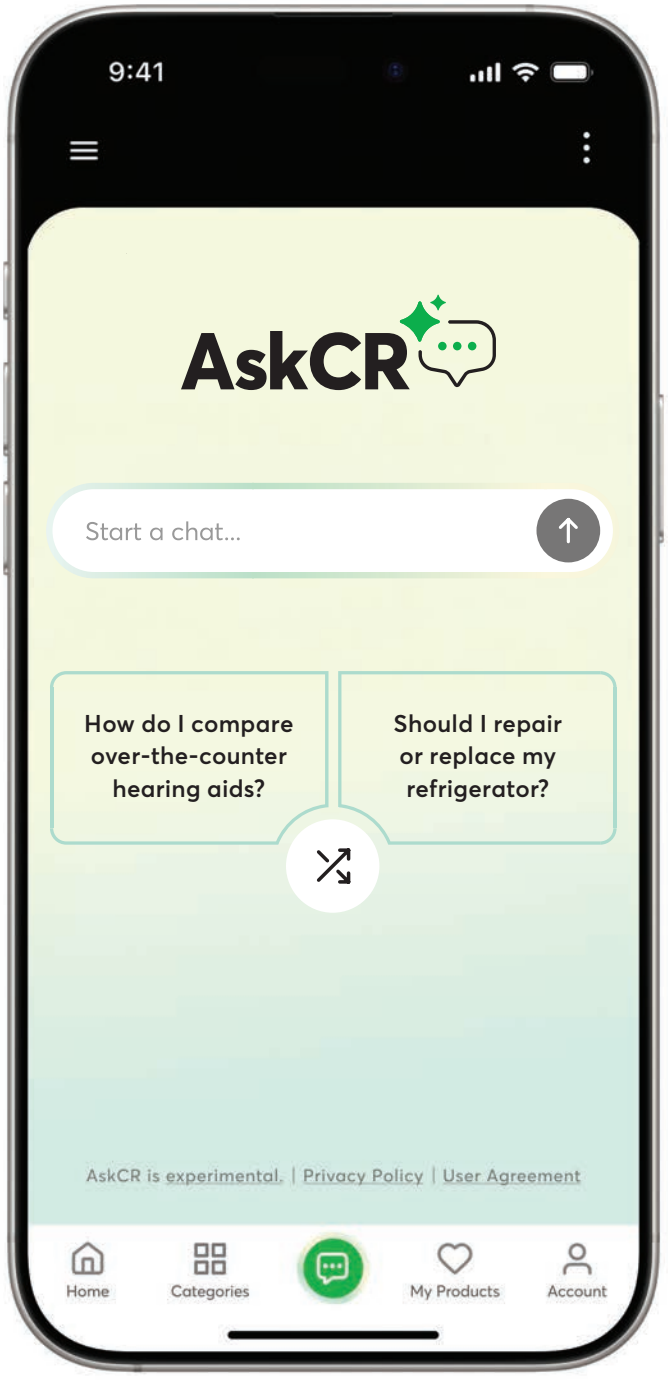
Laundry Fail

ERA 3X OXIBOOSTER $14

It costs less than many other liquid detergents in our ratings—but you might have to spend your savings on new clothes. In our tests, this Era detergent got a poor score for removing dirt and was only mediocre on grass and blood.

ICON: GETTY IMAGES

WORSE — BETTER



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